



\$2.50 a year.

Entered at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., at Second Class Mail Rates.

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December 26, 1882.

NO 163. VOL. VII. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y. PRICE, 5 CENTS

The Creole Cousins; OR, FALSE AS FAIR.

A Romance of the Tropics.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

The time, a midsummer afternoon.

The scene, a harbor at Havana.

In the foreground, rocking on the waves, a skiff with two occupants, officers of the American corvette, *Avalanche*, undergoing repairs after a rude buffeting by a tropical storm; first, Lieutenant Hazeltine, a young man for so responsible a position, tall, erect and broad-shouldered, chivalrous to impulsiveness and true as steel; second, Ned Taunton, a merry

midshipman, just at that period of adolescence when his greatest solicitude was the tardy development of a downy mustache.

In the background: *right*, the Spanish town, with its strange-looking, flat-roofed houses—*left*, Nature in all her tropical loveliness—*center*, a gloomy stone structure against whose base the waves beat ceaselessly.

"The convent of St. Celestine?" pursued Midshipman Taunton, looking at the grim building we have indicated. "There are only three dead-lights in all the broad side of the old hulk. The old barn looks like a prison."

"Reverently, Ned!" cautioned his friend, with mock awe. "A distinction without a difference. There are a great many prisoners in that old pile, too pretty to be buried alive, when so many of us poor fellows would give a month's pay for a smile from their rosy lips."

"La! the gallant luff is getting spoony!" laughed Taunton. "But what is that at yonder window? Hurrah! it's one of the fair prisoners!—and I claim her by right of discovery!"

"Age before beauty, Ned," objected his friend, directing a glass somewhat eagerly toward the convent. "She has a pensive air. She is leaning her elbow on the window-ledge, with her cheek in her palm."

"Pensive is she? That's the proper thing. All prisoners look pensively out over the sea, don't they? She's sighing for liberty and all that sort of thing. Give me another squint, old fellow, and I'll write her down for you from keel to pennant. Didn't know I was a *connaisseur* in the sex? No? Well, modesty prevents me from affirming the fact, though it is well known to all my friends. Meanwhile, lest you look the unfortunate one out of countenance, I'll take my trick at the glass, if you please!"

Lieutenant Hazeltine yielded the instrument rather reluctantly to his chattering friend.

"By old Ned and all his nymphs!" cried the latter, "she's weeping!"

"No!"

"See, now, that the light falls full upon her face."



"COUSIN NINA, I CAN'T CEASE WONDERING AT THE STRANGE ROMANCE IN YOUR LIFE."

And again the glass changed hands. "Taunton you're right!" admitted Hazel-tine.

He gazed earnestly at each lineament of the girl's delicate beauty, and his changing color showed that he was moved by no ordinary emotions.

Taunton, on the other hand, continued in the spirit of banter:

"Beauty in tears! Can gallant tars stand aloof? Rouse, ye sluggards! Pull to the rescue! Pick her up lively, lads! Lay alongside the old tub, fling grappling-irons, board her and sweep her decks! Avast, ye lubbers! Strike your flag—a petticoat, in this instance!—or we'll blow you out of water!"

And seizing the sculls, the rattle-brain was about to pull toward the convent, as if for a prize-ship.

"Not so precipitately, Ned," interposed his friend, more gravely than was his wont. "Let us get a nearer view; but if we row straight for the convent—and especially in that fashion—we may frighten her away from the window."

Approaching the shore diagonally, until they came perhaps within a hundred feet of it, some distance above the convent, our friends then changed their course so as to row by the building, assuming a careless air, yet keeping an eye on the window at which the object of their interest still sat.

She was in the simple dress of a novice; yet the rudest disguise could not hide her exquisite beauty, enhanced—at least for masculine eyes—by her evident distress.

As the naval officers came nearly opposite, the girl started, hastily brushed the tears away, and thrust her head forward, fixing her large, liquid eyes on Lieutenant Hazeltine with an expression of strong, eager admiration, which soon changed to a look of piteous appeal, while she clasped her hands, and her nether lip trembled perceptibly.

Chivalrous by nature, and of a profession whose gallantry is proverbial, the piteous glances bent upon him went straight to the young lieutenant's heart. In that moment he was ready to brave all the world, if need be, for this woman in distress. His eyes told her this, as he half-raised his hat to her.

A glad smile of eager, tremulous hope broke over her countenance, and fluttering a handkerchief, she disappeared from the window.

"Sweet Cupid! Here's an adventure. She's signaling to us. Eh!—our fairy has vanished into thin air!" cried Taunton, under his breath. "Messmate, that's a place of enchantment!"

But here he turned and caught sight of Harry Hazeltine's flushed face.

"*Whew!*" he ejaculated, his surprise finding vent in a prolonged whistle. "Shiver my starry top-lights, if the gallant luff isn't hit hard between wind and water!"

"Belay, there, on your red rag!" protested Hazeltine, coloring still more deeply. "Don't attract attention. She wants to communicate with us. Look over the side, as I do, as an excuse for our stopping."

Half-smiling and half-earnest, Midshipman Taunton did as requested; and the two, to all appearances, became interested in something at the bottom of the bay, while their skiff remained motionless.

A moment later something white fluttered through the air and alighted on the water near the base of the convent.

A few strokes sent the skiff close under the building, and the missive—for such it proved to be—was picked up by the lieutenant's eager hands.

It was traced in pencil on what was perhaps the fly-leaf of a prayer-book. The chirography was exquisitely dainty, as might be expected from so fair a scribe. It read:

"SEÑORS AMERICANOS:

"The most wretched of unfortunates salutes you—supplicates you! You are brave; you are gallant; you dare all things for the women of your blessed, free country. Can you turn a deaf ear to one more helpless than they? Alas! I, so young, who love the free air and sunshine, am cut off from them forever, unless you compassionate my pitiable condition and help me to escape. The victim of a cruel parent, who, to satisfy his pride, would have linked my young life with decaying old age, I fled to the protection of the Church. But, alas! can I languish in this living tomb while my youth fades away, when the wide, free world is all so beautiful and so full of happiness? I can write no more. My heart is breaking."

"If you are brave enough and generous enough to help me—and oh! you look so brave and strong!—come beneath my window to-night, after the moon has gone down. Make no noise, and expect no light in my window, or other signal from me. I will be on the watch, and let down a charm-bell at the end of a thread. The tinkle of the bell will direct you to the thread; and by this means we can communicate in safety."

"Oh! though you are strangers to me, I pray that your hearts may be moved; and the blessed Virgin will surely smile on you. INEZ MENTOZA."

On reading this appeal Lieutenant Hazeltine grew pale with rage; and it must be confessed that he inveighed somewhat profanely against an institution of which he really knew nothing except from popular rumor.

The merry midshipman, on the other hand, looked upon the situation less seriously.

"I'm a fish," he cried, "if this ain't the greatest lark! It takes me back to the Arabian Nights and Jack the Giant-Killer. Here's the donjon, and the Princess in duress vile, guarded by an ecclesiastical dragon. But how the deuce are we to help the matter? That's what lays me by the heels."

"How?" repeated the lieutenant, with energy. "Why, she herself has pointed the way. By snatching her from the infernal grasp of this—"

"Softly, my boy! This is the nineteenth century, remember—an age of detectives, and search-warrants, and other inconvenient legal appurtenances too numerous to mention. We can't run her off to our castle, and bid defiance to all comers, since the only castle we have access to is the fore-castle of the *Avalanche*—not a suitable place for a lady, as you will—"

"Ned, stop chaffing, do! If you are afraid to join me—"

"Afraid! I scorn the imputation!" cried the midshipman, with mock disdain. "To be sure, we will in all probability be caught and shot, without judge or jury, by the outraged authorities. A mere *bagatelle*, however, hardly worthy of consideration, where *duty* or *beauty* calls. But here is a practical question: when we get her on our hands, what the dickens shall we do with her?"

"It will be time enough to think of that when we have her outside of these walls!"

"Hal," observed the midshipman, looking with a half smile into his comrade's excited face "you have got it bad, and no mistake."

"Admitting that, if you will have it so," said the other, with a touch of asperity, "are you or are you not with me in this adventure?—for I am determined to attempt this lady's escape!"

"Hal," said Taunton, with sudden seriousness, "you know me. I never flunked in my life! If you are shot for sacrilege, demme! I'll be shot too!"

They clasped hands on it, as men are wont to renew the covenants of friendship.

"Ned," said his friend, "we have no time to lose. Go on board and smuggle away a suit of your clothes. I think they are small enough to fit Donna Inez. Meanwhile I will look up a place to take her to. Rendezvous here at midnight. The moon goes down a little after one. Before morning that vampire shall be robbed of its prey!"

Immediately upon reading Donna Inez's note they had rowed away from the convent. They were now arrived at their landing-place. Once more clasping hands, they parted company.

At midnight they were again together, Hazeltine in the meantime having provided himself with a long rope.

The moon had sunk below the horizon; the silence of the grave reigned around; the skiff rested motionless on the water beneath the convent wall!

CHAPTER II.

THE SLAVER.

THE scene was as beautiful as the eye need wish to rest upon—the Caribbean Sea with its foam-capped billows running high, and borne on its bosom two noble ships under full spread of canvas. Only a puff of white smoke rising from the deck of the corvette, far astern of the brig, marred the picture by its suggestion of hostile passions and bloodshed.

But on a nearer view the deck of the *Black Swan* presented a spectacle well calculated to fill the beholder with misgivings and repulsion.

In her mottled crew, more than an honest ship's complement, every nation of Europe seemed represented, and that, too, by its worst types. No pirate's hell-dogs were of more forbidding aspect. But, devils as they were, not a man but quailed before the glare of Capt. Gaskill's wolfish eyes and the livid set of his implacable face.

The *Black Swan* was a slaver—her crew were ocean outlaws—the corvette was the hand of civilized humanity stretched forth to crush a nefarious traffic in human life and human happiness!

"Our only hope is the Little Gut channel."

said the captain of the slaver, anxiously. "The corvette dare not attempt the pass, and it will give us five hours' start."

The Gut was reached at last, and it seemed as if the smaller craft were going bows on to the breakers, where the sea was churned to foam by the jagged reef.

But, though tossed about like a cockle-shell, the sport of the surging waters, she sped on unharmed, until she entered a tortuous channel between two islands, so narrow that the palms that overhung the water on either hand left scarce room for her spreading canvas, and through which the water coursed like the rapids of some river.

Beyond the islands the slaver emerged into comparatively smooth water, safe at last from her pursuer, though her rigging now hung in tatters, and her hull had received some unsightly rents. Before tempting the winds and waves of the broad Atlantic repairs were sadly needed; and the brig was brought to anchor in a little cove shut in by a group of palm-embowered islets.

One day Capt. Gaskill was "stretching his legs on shore" in company with his mate, when on the further side of one of the islands he discovered a canoe drawn up on the beach, and at a little distance three human beings who proved to be natives of the Antilles.

Two—a man and a woman—were as little attractive as savages are apt to be; but the third—perhaps their daughter—a maiden of scarce twelve or thirteen years of age, yet with the premature development of the tropics, was a picture to warm the heart of an anchorite.

Her *petite* figure was perfect in its symmetry; its budding charms set off rather than concealed by the short-skirted tunic of white cloth which was the only garment she wore. In marked contrast, her long black hair fell unconfined below her waist. In her olive cheeks was the ruddy hue of health, the exquisite mantling of the hot tropical blood that coursed through her veins. Her delicately-molded face was lighted by flashing black eyes and small white teeth, that showed when her full ripe lips parted in a smile, or as now, in surprise.

On this embodiment of innocence and beauty, fresh from the hand of bounteous nature, fell the evil eyes of the slaver captain, with a gloating expression of reckless covetousness that needed no interpreter.

"By the Eternal!" cried the heartless ruffian, stopping dead still with astonishment and admiration—"a Venus in bronze! Kedrick, that girl shall be queen of the *Black Swan*! I swear it!"

The older woman was heard to utter a few chattering words, to which the man responded in guttural tones. Then the three Indians set off at a run for their canoe.

"Head them off!" cried Capt. Gaskill. "By all the furies they shall not escape!"

Captain and mate ran at the top of their speed to intercept the fugitives, and being nearer the canoe, they were successful.

Seeing this hope cut off, the Indian women unhesitatingly plunged into the water to swim. The man stopped at the water's edge to cover their flight, resolutely opposing Capt. Gaskill with a cudgel.

The slave captain was in no mood to brook resistance. Drawing a pistol, he ruthlessly shot the islander, and leaping over his fallen body, plunged into the water after the object of his desires.

The pursuer was no mean swimmer; but these amphibious dwellers in the midst of the sea are equally at home on land, or in the water, and the huntsman was no match for his agile quarry.

She was fast increasing the distance between them, when he cried to his mate:

"The canoe! the canoe! Perdition seize the little imp! I'm a Dutch lugger to her. Quick! or she'll leave us in the lurch, as it is."

The mate pushed off the canoe, sprung in, and began to ply the paddle, a little awkwardly, yet with sufficient skill to outstrip the most expert swimmer.

"Hurrah! Now you have her!" cried the struggling captain, as his subordinate urged his frail craft to the very side of the fugitive maiden.

But, even as the mate dropped his paddle and extended his hand to clutch her, she dove beneath the water, and swam away like an otter.

"After her! Keep directly over her! She's got to come up for air!" shouted the captain.

And resuming his paddle, the mate did as directed.

Terror kept the girl beneath the water until she was nearly suffocated, and spurred her to

frantic efforts to outstrip the canoe; but struggle as she might, it was ever just at hand.

With the last remnant of her flagging strength the poor creature resorted to strategy.

Turning suddenly, she came up under the canoe and made an effort to overturn it. If she could but throw the man into the water, she might easily escape him.

She succeeded in capsizing the crank craft. But the mate divined her purpose, calculated the point at which she would come up, leaped into the air as the canoe went over, and descending at her very side just as her head emerged from the water, clutched her long hair in his iron gripe.

Finding herself a prisoner, the girl uttered shrill cries of dismay, and attacked her captor with a fury for which he was ill-prepared. In this she was aided by her mother, who swam to the rescue of her offspring.

With a fair field, in open water, and free from interruption, these women might eventually have drowned their enemy—a fate well deserved—their skill more than balancing his superior strength. But, clutching the canoe with one hand, the mate managed to keep his head above water a part of the time, while he clung to the girl's thick hair with a gripe which her wildest exertion of strength could not relax.

Yet, with this advantage, he was fain to gasp:

"For God's sake, hurry! or these she-devils will drown me!"

"Hang on! hang on!" shouted the captain, who was swimming to the scene of conflict with all his might. "One moment, and I will be with you! Here I am! Now, by the seven devils, I've got the fairest prize in the Antilles!"

Relieved of his captive, the mate turned on the mother with an oath, but uttering a terrible cry of maternal anguish, the poor creature darted away beyond his reach, where she sustained herself, loth to leave her child, though she could render her no further assistance.

The girl ceased to struggle. Fixing her terror-distended eyes on the face of her brutal captor, she rested in his arms, panting.

Gloating on her beauty, while he regained his breath, he alternately felicitated himself and praised the zeal of his coadjutor.

Clinging to the canoe, they swam ashore, the mother following at a little distance.

On the beach the wretched father lay, breathing heavily, with the blood welling from his naked breast. His eyes, fast glazing in death, turned toward his helpless child and her captors. The terrible anguish in his face showed that the heart of love beats as warmly in the savage as the civilized breast.

The maiden extended her arms toward him with a cry which in her native tongue may have been the name of father; but she was borne hastily away, never to see him again.

Still the mother followed, until captors and captive had crossed the island, entered the jolly-boat, rowed to the vessel, and been taken aboard. While her child was thus torn from her, the mother crouched on the beach, like some animal in her voiceless, tearless grief.

Though many eyes witnessed this infamous outrage, not one chivalrous emotion was awakened in the breasts of the abandoned crew. Those who did not look on in stolid indifference attested their utter baseness by a smile of derision, or a heartless jest.

Into his cabin the captain bore his prize; and, the repairs now being completed, the anchor was weighed and the snow-white sails let fall.

On the shore crouched the figure of a woman, who watched the ship until it sunk down under the horizon. Then she rose, crossed the island, and sat down beside a stark, still body, stretched supine on the beach, its glassy eyes turned heavenward, as if appealing there for vengeance.

The widowed and child-bereaved uttered no moan, let fall no tears, but, with her mantle thrown over her head, sat motionless, the picture of inconsolable grief.

Night came, and with it the fury of a tropical tempest. The rain beat upon the bowed head; the winds plucked at the enveloping mantle; the angry billows surged high on the beach. She rose, dragged her dead beyond their reach and crouched over it as silent as before.

The terrible night passed, and the invisible sun reached the meridian, giving just light enough to reveal the awful grandeur of the battling elements.

Then on the tossing waters appeared a canoe, and in it a youth, standing erect and peering anxiously through the gloom, while he plied a paddle with inimitable skill, avoiding the toppling wave-crests that threatened at every moment to swamp his frail bark.

His keen black eye caught sight of two motionless objects on the beach, and a cry of blended exultation and despair passed his lips.

With giant strokes he forced his canoe on the crest of a wave which bore him toward the shore with race-horse speed. As it broke with a booming roar on the shingle the canoe was filled with water; but its agile navigator leaped out, caught its prow, and held it against the receding wave. With a skillful turn he tipped the water out, so that the next wave bore his boat and him high up on the beach.

A moment, and he was beside the figures which the storm could not rouse, his hand on the woman's shoulder, his voice calling to her, his eyes, filled with horror by the ghastly dead, seeking explanation of the living.

The story was soon told.

Then, kneeling beside the dead, the youth swore a terrible oath of vengeance, and sealed it with a kiss on his dagger-hilt.

Meanwhile the Black Swan sailed on; but in her cabin was a poor creature who neither ate nor slept. If any one touched her, she seemed to shrink within herself, and, quivering in every nerve, gazed at them dumbly, with eyes whose abject terror thrilled even the heart of the slaver captain.

Almost since her coming on board a terrific storm had raged. The superstitious crew began to shake their heads and mutter together with ominous frowns. They believed that the Indian girl and her people had wrought a spell for the destruction of the vessel.

In vain the captain swore. The very helplessness of his victim baffled him. And, at last, disgusted with his bootless victory, and perhaps fearful of mutiny, he said to his mate:

"Well, I'm tired of the infernal little fool! As soon as the blow is over I'll put her in an open boat and set her adrift. You may let the crew know it indirectly—not as a concession to them, but as my own motion."

The crew were well pleased, and took the abatement of the storm, which soon followed, as the result of the captain's resolve.

Then, when the sea was calm enough so that a boat could live, a human being was abandoned to the tender mercies of nature—not less kindly, surely, than the man whose heart was turned to stone.

And as the night settled down over the waste of waters the ship sailed on, leaving the boat to rock on the waves, drifting whither the winds listed, and for the first time the captive—captive no longer—slept.

CHAPTER III.

THE CREOLE COUSINS.

IMAGINE, if you please, a trellis-work arbor, overgrown with a grape-vine, loaded with bunches of luscious fruit, within easy reach of the hand. Beneath it a silken hammock, and reclining therein as languidly-graceful a beauty as ever tempted the brush of Oriental painter. Her sloe-black eyes, her red lips, her molded arm, her daintily-slippered foot, her soft drape, the scarlet shawl hanging from the hammock, in such exquisite harmony with her brunette beauty—But the pen falters. Word-pictures are always tame.

Languidly she watched the occupation of a girl of not more than twelve years of age, who, seated on a tiger-skin with her lap full of flowers, was weaving a chaplet.

The beauty of the girl was striking by reason of its contrasts. Her blonde hair and fair complexion she owed to her Saxon mother; but her dark eyes, her vividly-scarlet lips, the molding of feature and premature development of figure showed that tropical blood mingled with the colder current of the North.

"Cousin Nina," she said, looking up from her work; and the animation of her face was in marked contrast with the dreamy lassitude of the other—"cousin Nina, I can't cease wondering at the strange romance in your life. It is so odd to have you back among us, after we have believed you dead for so long. Just think!—a whole year almost within stone-throw, and we knew nothing about you!"

"There is but one thing more tiresome than trying to forecast the future, and that is dwelling on the past!" yawned the languid beauty.

"Paola, I should think your unremitted enthusiasm would keep you unpleasantly warm."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the little miss. "Coz, you're too lazy to fan yourself! I wonder that you ever mustered the energy to run away from your old lover. How romantic to have a rich old Don making eyes at you. Ha! ha! ha!"—and her merry laugh rung out like a chime of silver bells. "Wouldn't I tease the old gray-beard! I wouldn't run away from him—not I!"

I'd stumble over his gouty foot, and tickle his bald head with a feather when he fell asleep—I'd take the glasses out of his spectacles and put pepper in his snuff—I'd trick him out like a gay young gallant, so that everybody would laugh, and promenade him up and down in tight boots until he could hardly stand for pain; then I would insist upon his being my cavalier, until every joint was rheumatic, and he had to be lifted from the saddle. In a week my old beau would have a new ache at the mere sight of me; in two he would commit suicide, or fly the island!"

And again her merry laugh rung forth.

"But, Nina," she pursued, more soberly, "you should not have doubted us. See how papa's influence has freed you."

"I owe Don Alfonso a debt of gratitude I can never pay," said Nina, with apparent feeling.

"Nonsense! Your own mother's brother? It is the same as if he had acted for me. Instead of vegetating in that fisherman's cot for a year, you might have been happy with us, all along. *Dio mio!* how wearisome it must have been for one loving luxury as you do!"

"You are all too kind—"

And Nina ended by putting her lace handkerchief to her eyes, as if much affected.

"There, have I made you weep, my poor sister?" cried Paola, immediately on her feet and ready with a caress.

"Do not mind my weakness, cousin Paola," said Nina, with seeming grateful affection.

The roll of a carriage interrupted these sisterly interchanges of love.

"You are decided not to accompany us on our little excursion?" asked Paola.

"Yes; between my book and a bath I shall manage to dispose of the afternoon."

"You coquette! you are husbanding your resources for the evening!" laughed Paola, teasingly. "Well, *adios!*"

And like a ray of sunshine she was gone, bearing her floral treasures in her arms.

Now a change came over the languid beauty. Her eyes flashed with sufficient animation, as she glanced after her departing cousin. The muscles a moment ago lax were now tense, as she sat upright in the hammock, dropping her feet to the ground.

"Little fool!" was her soliloquy, "I hate her for her baby innocence and sweetness! There is no blot on her past, no shadow of doubt overhanging her future. She has no thought nor care beyond the little pains and pleasures of the present!"

"Ah! I was once like her!"

And the woman threw herself back in the hammock, pressing her hands over her eyes, while she struggled with a thrice of emotion.

"Now I am fierce and vindictive, defiant of Fate, and envious of those less wretched than I. Her very lightness of heart fills me with savage resentment. Bah! why should I be singled out for a wrong that cannot be repaired? I hate him! *I hate him!*"

"Without laying myself open to a charge of unwarrantable curiosity, may I hark 'oom it is you 'ate so bitterly, my lady?"

In the speaker's voice was a strange blending of humility and familiarity, of deprecation and menace, of politeness and sarcasm.

The lady had heard no warning footstep, and the words which passion had goaded her into uttering aloud had fallen upon the ears of one whom she was far from loving or trusting; yet with her imperturbable self-control she did not start. Removing her hand from her eyes, she said:

"I dislike a spy."

The choice of words was in keeping with her languid tone. It was as if she were too listless to entertain an antipathy stronger than dislike.

With seeming perfect indifference her eyes condescended to rest upon a man of the English type.

He was of full habit and florid complexion, with a scant crop of hair growing over his ears and at the base of his skull, leaving the crown of his head bald. Wiry, sandy whiskers grew in a line scarcely more than an inch wide from the temples to the base of the jaw; cheeks, chin, upper lip and throat being clean shaven. He was dressed in a style which showed the influence of cockney birth and breeding, and mopped his bald poll, face and neck with a flaming red bandanna handkerchief.

He bowed and smiled, as he replied:

"Perhaps you are more accurate than complimentary in your designation of me, my lady. But if spies are 'ated, they may halso sometimes be feared!"

"Indeed?" cried the lady, with the formal politeness with which one treats a bore.

"Yes! I've found you hout!"

"Ah!"

"Hif I must speak plainer, I've hascertained w'ere and 'ow you spent your year of—let me say *sequestration!*"

The Englishman was triumphant, exultant.

The woman was outwardly unmoved. Only a hand hidden away in the folds of her dress clutched the fabric spasmodically.

"Pleasant information!" she said indifferently, to all seeming.

"Valuable hinformation, my lady!"

For the first time the lady took the trouble to retort:

"Accept my congratulations that you have something about you not worthless."

The sneer lay all in her words. There was no trace of emotion in her tone.

Angrily the Englishman retorted:

"Ave a care, my lady! You carry yourself with a mighty 'igh 'ead; but it's lucky for you that the hinformation fell into 'ands so discreet as mine."

"Discreet? That means that you would accept a bribe?"

"I'd scorn a bribe!"

"A rose by any other name.' Let us call it a *consideration*."

"You're wrong. I ain't hafter 'ush money, at all."

"Terms?"

"Well, I'm hopen to terms."

"Ah! I thought so!"

"But I ain't no blackmailer. All I say is, 'Ands off!' You wink at me, and I'll wink at you."

"You're in the presence of a lady. Reserve your slang for fellows of your own stamp."

"You know w'at I mean. You've come 'ere, a hinterloper, so to speak; and in two weeks' time you've wormed your way into Don Alfonso's good books. You've come between me and 'im. I know it, and you know it. You could serve me a dirty trick, if the 'umor seized you. But now I've got a ring in your nose; it'll stand you in 'and to be friends rather than enemies."

"Oh, I am not afraid that you will betray anything you may know."

"W'y not, I'd like to know?"

"I count on your loyalty."

"To you? I don't howe you nothink."

"Your loyalty to self is the only thing I place any reliance in. However, I shall now perhaps place you somewhat under obligations to me."

"Ow, pray?"

"First by a warning. Your rascality has been discovered."

The languid lady laid no stress on this startling announcement.

The man was struck breathless.

"My rascality?"

"Exactly. Don Alfonso has sent a messenger to look you up. He may find you here at any moment."

"My God! I'm ruined!"

"When you go into his presence this alternative will be placed before you:—a prison-cell and a convict's chain, or affluence and honor in the eyes of men."

"Ow the latter halternative?"

"You will have a chance to sell yourself to the devil."

The man stared in amazement at this woman who spoke with the nonchalant ease of society gossip.

"I don't catch your drift," he said.

"If Don Alfonso lives an hour longer, you will go to prison. If he is dead one hour hence, you will assume control of his wealth as sole executor and guardian of his daughter."

"Ow do you know?"

"It is a fact."

"But to gain this?"

"He must die."

"And I—"

"Bah! You have done as bad in the past."

At this chance thrust the man turned ghastly pale.

"W'at do you know of my life?" he asked, tremulously.

"Nothing. Here comes the arrogant Balso, now. Everybody knows his sullen disposition. If he and Don Alfonso are slain in the same room, you can swear that in resentment for punishment the slave killed the master, and that you visited swift vengeance upon him. There—you have your cue. Hush!"

At this point a mulatto appeared at the door of the arbor. He had an intelligent face, and bore but few traces of his African admixture of blood. His bearing was a strange blending of pride and humility, and in his eyes appeared a smoldering fire, as if one who chafed under the ignominy of his position.

He was the Spanish Don's valet.

"*Senor Wetherby*, Don Alfonso awaits you in the library," he said; and his words and accent showed cultivation.

Bowing deferentially he made way: and, purple in the face, James Wetherby preceded him toward the house.

"The train is fired!" cried the woman, fiercely. "Now, if he has courage equal to his villainy!"

Suddenly covering her face with her hands, she sunk back.

"Ah! the arch fiend has taken possession of me! Ever since that hour! We never know what is in our natures until they are put to the test. Bah! I did not make myself. I am as I am! I rest in the hands of Fate!"

After a few moments she arose and proceeded with all her affected languor to the house.

Before the library door she stopped to listen.

From the room came a cry of dismay and a groan of mortal anguish.

"There's devil's work within. Perhaps it will be the better for a witness," muttered the woman, and threw open the door.

On the threshold she stood like a beautiful fiend; but the spectacle within froze her blood, and swaying, she fell forward in a swoon.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE BLIND.

IN profound silence the lieutenant and midshipman of the corvette *Avalanche* waited beneath the convent wall.

"Can she have failed to discover us?" whispered the latter, with the impatience of youth.

Hal Hazeltine clasped his arm to enjoin silence.

Presently a faint tinkling sound reached their ears.

"There it comes!" whispered the middy.

"Hush!" breathed Hazeltine, and his heart stood still.

The sound slowly drew nearer, descending the wall.

Lieutenant Hazeltine stretched forth his hand in the darkness, directed only by the sense of hearing, until he felt a little charm-bell drop into his palm. The cold metal thrilled him like an electric shock.

He gave two slight tugs on the string to which the bell was attached, and its further descent was arrested.

Hastily he fastened to the thread a piece of paper and the end of a piece of twine, and signaled again by two tugs.

The missive, drawn upward, disappeared in the darkness. The uncoiling twine, showed when it reached the hand of the lady above.

With rapidly-beating heart and trembling hands Inez Mentoza carried the note to a taper which burned faintly in her cell. It read:

"FAIR LADY:

"Your appeal has not gone forth in vain. One who counts it a blessed privilege to place his life at your service awaits you below. Everything has been arranged for your escape from your detestable imprisonment. Draw up the twine, to which you will find attached a rope and a bundle of clothes. It is imperative that you don these unaccustomed garments, that your identity may be the more successfully lost. When you have made this change in your attire, draw the rope through the staple which secures your shutter until the end returns to my hand. A moment later I will be with you. Then I defy the world to take you from me before my hand is relaxed in death!

"I need not admonish you to make haste with caution. I await your signal with throbbing heart. May God requite me as I guard the sacred trust of your life and honor!"

HARRY HAZELTINE."

"Ah! he is as gallant as he is handsome!" breathed the woman, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. "Such as he would not have shamed the knights of chivalry. Not like the cowardly—Bah! perish the thought of him!"

At the end of this brief soliloquy the beautiful face of the woman underwent a marked change. Its sweetness of expression gave place to a frown of bitter aversion, which chased the rich color from her cheeks and lips and hardened the vivacious flash of her eyes into a vindictive glitter. The change was a perfect metamorphosis. She was scarcely recognizable as the same being.

As quickly another change took place. With a look of defiance she pressed the note to her lips, crying, as if in apostrophe of the object of her hatred:

"I shall love him; and I know that I can win him. He is brave! He is generous! He is worthy of that which a dastard poltroon cast from him at the first breath of adversity. *Salvador mio!* I fly to thee!"

The color was again glowing softly in cheeks and lips, and the eyes beaming mildly, as with

an eager smile she turned to the bundle of clothes so unlike what she was accustomed to.

With suppressed laughter at her awkward attempts to adjust the several garments to her person, she made the exchange, and stood forth a youth whose beauty of face alone would have exposed the imposture.

Then she drew the rope through the staple, and scarlet with embarrassment, yet withal disposed to laugh at the sorry figure she cut, awaited the coming of the gallant lieutenant.

Hand over hand, in true sailor-fashion, he ascended the rope, and presently stood within the chamber breathless, not with exertion, but at the vision of loveliness that met his view.

With her shoulders drawn forward, and her hands clasped before her breast, in an attitude of shrinking timidity—with her red lips apart, and her eyes gazing upon him in a searching scrutiny, she stood.

Only for an instant. Then, advancing with both hands extended, and her beautiful face lighted by a smile of perfect trust and eager gratitude, she cried:

"*Salvador mio!* how can I thank you?"

With the words she sunk upon her knees at his feet, and pressed his hand to her lips, before he was aware of her purpose.

In painful embarrassment, yet thrilled by a sense of ecstasy that he had never before experienced, Lieutenant Hazeltine raised the beautiful woman.

"It is more fitting that I should kneel to you," he whispered. "But, come! Every moment is an age of danger. Let us lose no time. Read this."

And he thrust a sheet of paper into her hands. On it was traced:

"It is my purpose to make it appear that you have committed suicide, and so gain time by diverting the pursuit. That my voice in dictation might not betray my presence to any chance listener, I have written what I wish you to copy and leave behind you. It is as follows:—"

Appended was such a letter as might be written by a desperate girl in Donna Inez's situation on taking leave of the world, with which, however, we need not tax the reader.

Having copied it, as directed, the beautiful Creole turned to Lieutenant Hazeltine.

"*Salvador mio*, I attend your pleasure," she said, sweetly.

"Pardon me. I shall have to lift you in my arms," said the lieutenant, flushing in spite of himself.

"I trust myself to you as to a brother," breathed the girl with a smile that brought the blood again to his forehead.

"A trust as sacred as it is precious to me, I beg you to believe!"

Lifting her, he sat her on the window-ledge and placed himself beside her. From his neck, in front, depended a loop of rope, the proper length of which he had calculated at a venture.

"Put your feet in this loop and your arms about my neck," he whispered. "You can thus easily sustain your whole weight, which is necessary, as my hands will both be employed in making the descent."

She did as directed, and he thrilled with delight at the clasp of her arms, and her warm breath on his cheek.

Swinging clear of the window-ledge, he descended rapidly to the boat, and then drew the rope through the staple, so that there was no trace of Donna Inez's mode of escape.

Silently the boat glided away, bearing hearts palpitating with more than one emotion.

Lieut. Hazeltine communicated the rest of his plans to his fair charge, when she interposed:

"I have a place of refuge already in mind, with the parents of a former maid of mine. They are fishers, and live in great seclusion on the shore of the sea, not many miles from Havana."

"We can then get horses, and place you in safety, to-night," said Hal.

And this plan was acted upon.

Leaving Donna Inez not far from the boat-landing, the lieutenant and middy went for horses, and returned.

Ned Taunton now dismounted, to give place to Donna Inez; and as many Spanish ladies ride with ease in the saddle generally assigned to the sterner sex, our heroine had no difficulty in carrying out, even in this unusual fashion, her assumed character.

Two hours later she dismounted before a lowly cot, whose tenants, when aroused, received her with unbounded surprise, yet with tears of joy which attested their devotion to her.

Leaving her with them, Lieutenant Hazeltine rode back toward the city, until he met his faithful friend, Ned Taunton, who had walked some distance on the deserted road, that he

might ride into the city with his friend, as a led horse might awaken curiosity which they wished to avoid.

"Ned," said Hal, with feeling, "I'll never forget this service!"

"Tut! tut!" laughed the middy. "Didn't I get you into the scrape by discovering the beauty? If you get out of it half as easy as you got in, I lose my guess!"

And Taunton proved to be a true prophet; for, of course, the "salvador" had to carry to his *protegee* the newspaper accounts of her supposed suicide, and afterward return at least every other day to assure himself of her safety and to apprise her that suspicion of imposture was not yet aroused, though the bay had been dragged without success for her body.

Over this separation the merry middy sighed with mock dolor:

"Hein! hein! behold the inconstancy of friendship! A new face—a smile—a word, and I am forgotten!"

Just before the *Avalanche* was ready for sea Lieutenant Hazeltine tendered his resignation, to the unbounded astonishment of everybody save Midshipman Taunton; but when on the eve of sailing the latter was invited to a private wedding, even the merry middy became thoroughly sober for once.

"Hal," he said, "of course you can sail your own craft best; but it seems to me you're scudding before a pretty *rapid* gale. All I've got to say is—look out for breakers!"

The infatuated lover clasped his friend's hand with a confident smile.

"She is alone and unprotected," he said, "and exposed to persecution if discovered, I have persuaded her to waive all conventionalities, and give me the right to stand between her and all the world. For the rest, Ned, I'm the happiest, the luckiest dog that ever got more than his deserts—more than his wildest dreams! My only fear for the future is that I shall awaken the jealousy of Fate, and be robbed of her by death. It's too much happiness to be continued to any mortal!"

And in his great love the strong man was moved almost to tears.

A Protestant minister who had gathered a small flock of American residents was to perform the ceremony. Sectarian feeling made the secret of Donna Inez's identity safe with him and his wife. The latter and Midshipman Taunton were the only witnesses.

And so, for good or ill, Lieutenant Harry Hazeltine was married to a woman of whom he knew absolutely nothing, save that she had enslaved him body and soul.

A year later he stood on the quay, welcoming his returned friend, now Lieutenant Taunton, and said, while he held the hand of the latter in a firm clasp:

"Ned, for one year she has lain next my heart; and I declare to you that on all God's footstool there's not a happier man than I!"

While he stood thus, his wife, pale as death and quivering from head to foot, confronted a man who had invaded the sanctity of her home, and with folded arms and lowering brows regarded her in silence, swayed by emotions as profound as her own.

When his happiness seemed most secure, the bolt was sped which was to shatter the dream of the man to whom the gods had vouchsafed one year of unalloyed bliss!

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF A TRAGEDY.

IN a secluded spot, a little removed from one of the beautiful suburbs of Havana, Harry Hazeltine had set up his household gods, and for one year called the place home and heaven.

To all external appearances, never was more devoted wife than Donna Inez. She seemed to forget the coquetry and love of excitement incident to her youth and nationality, and find perfect content in her quiet home.

But all in a day came a terrible change!

One sunny afternoon, while her husband was in the city to welcome his old friend, now Lieutenant Taunton, Donna Inez was reclining dreamily in a silken hammock, hung in a vine-draped bower, when a horseman rode up to the villa, tied his horse within the screen of a clump of undergrowth, and after a slight reconnaissance discovered the mistress of the mansion and strode into her presence.

When she discovered him he stood there with folded arms and forbidding brow. Instantly she leaped up, pale and trembling.

"Senor Rubio, what is the meaning of this intrusion?" she cried, with icy *hauteur*, as soon as she could command her voice.

"Senora Hazeltine!" retorted the Spaniard.

laying a venomous stress on the name, "it is the return of one who claims a pledge."

"A pledge?"

"A pledge!"

"From me to you?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, infamous!"

The woman confronted him with clenched hands and blazing eyes, with the scathing indignation of an outraged queen.

With a smile of icy contempt the man bowed, replying:

"I agree with you. *Most infamous!*"

"What do you mean, coward, perjurer, repudiator of ties the most holy—of vows the most sacred?"

"Behold Satan rebuking sin!" cried the man, hotly. "Your effrontery is equal to your perfidy. Your accursed beauty covers the hollowest heart that ever—"

"What! Dare you upbraid me! Hound!—curl!—you should crawl from my presence! I despise you! I spit upon you! My utter hatred and loathing for you finds a parallel only in—"

"In your love for Senor Hazeltine!"

"Ay! In my love for a man, not a poltroon!"

"Hah!"

With a sharp aspiration of concentrated rage the Spaniard started forward, as if to grasp her wrist.

Like a flash a stiletto (a mere toy, yet dangerous directed by such passion as hers) appeared in her hand.

"Back!—slave!—fighter of women! You, dead to all sense of honor—it is worthy of you to threaten the weak! But do not think me helpless. I can yet brave Senor Manuel Rubio!"

And scathing contempt flashed from her eyes and seemed to scorch the name as it passed her lips.

Stung to white rage, the Spaniard cried:

"Some men would kill you; I shall have a fuller revenge. I will make you a widow, and let you live!"

"Bah! do you think my husband would fear such a wretch as you? Were he here, he would whip you from him with a lash, as you deserve! When you, bound to me by every pledge of honor, deserted me, he, a stranger, braved all he world to rescue me."

"I desert you!" cried Rubio.

"Yes. Do you know what I did with your base letter? I gave it to a hungry dog which rent and mangled it to pulp!"

"My letter? I wrote you no letter."

"Liar! Did not you say that my father's dishonor—Ah! shall I parley with such a—Man! man! when wealth without stint would have been poured into my lap—when I had but to stretch forth my hand—nay, remain passive and accept the proudest position in Cuba, I remained true to you—*Dio mio!* have I sunk so low that I can make this confession?"

For a moment the seething volcano of outraged love burst through the bounds of pride, and the woman disclosed her heart; but contempt again raised an icy barrier, and choking with emotion she dashed the hot tears from her eyes and fought bravely for self-mastery.

But her words had wrought a great change in the man. Breathlessly he cried:

"Inez, can there be some terrible mistake? I swear to you that I wrote you no letter! It came to me all in one blow—your father's misfortune and the account of your death. For a year I have mourned you, until yesterday I discovered you—Oh, my God!"

He covered his face with his hands and reeled back, as if from a shock.

The woman was stunned to bewilderment. She passed her hand before her eyes, and brushed the hair back from her temples, as if to clear her brain.

Then slowly a terrible, white desperation came over her.

Advancing toward the man, she extended her stiletto to him.

"Manuel," she said, in icy tones, "*kill me!*"

His name on her lips thrilled the man to the soul. Snatching his hands from before his face, and shaking back his flowing hair as if it were a mane, he gazed at her.

"Inez!" he exclaimed, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, holding himself away from her, as from what he feared to be a delusive dream.

"Kill me, or I will kill myself!" she cried, beginning to pant hysterically.

With a swoop he leaped toward her, snatched from her hand and threw away the dagger that threatened her life, and holding her at arm's-

length, gazed at her in an agony of suspense, while his breath came and went in great gasping sobs.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he cried.

She choked with emotion. Her head sunk forward. She swayed as if about to fall.

He saw that her strength was leaving her and caught her wildly to his breast.

"Tell me!—oh, tell me!" he persisted.

"I mean that my blind folly—my accursed pride has ruined us both!" she gasped.

With a shout of laughter the man strained her to his heart, and began to cover her face with kisses.

"You love me!—you love me!" he cried.

"You are not lost, but saved! At a word a year is blotted out, and we are again heart to heart—lip to lip!"

"Manuel," sighed the woman, "we are not the same. My father and the old man who would have made me his wife have triumphed even in their defeat. In the bitterness of my chagrin, when I thought that you had cast me off, and to defeat my father who pressed me for a union with Don Carlos, the Governor-general, I entered a convent, as you know. Then, to escape the horrors of that living tomb, and to avenge myself on you and on my own heart, I bound myself to another."

"But you do not love him, Inez—you cannot love him! My claim is paramount. From this hour, when your heart again acknowledges the allegiance which it has really never disavowed, your continued union with this man violates Heaven's law. When soul mates with soul all empty lip-vows are voided. Inez, my love, my hope, my life!—I adjure you, be true to me, be true to your own heart! We can fly far from here, where no one will ever know this unhappy episode in our lives, and, loving, as none others ever loved, be happy!"

He sought to draw her away, as if to begin their flight at once.

The woman lay helpless in his arms, clinging about his neck. Whether she would have resisted or not, the opportunity was taken out of her hands by Fate.

A footfall, a shadow, and her husband stood in the presence of the wreck of his happiness!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAITHLESS WIFE.

NED TAUNTON pressed the hand of his friend cordially.

"Old fellow, it does me more good than I can tell you to hear you speak as you do. I confess that I have often thought of our adventure with unpleasant forebodings. You must admit that you went it rather blindly."

"And had a fool's luck, as the saying is. Ned, my happiness is without a flaw; and you'll say that it's well founded when you have become acquainted with my wife."

"Which I hope will not be far in the future."

"You know me better! Our horses are in waiting. My little Eden is only ten miles distant."

Soon they were in the saddle, and on the way Harry Hazeltine told his friend his wife's history, as he knew it!—her father, on the brink of financial ruin, had tried to force her into a marriage with a rich old Don, who, in consideration, was to stay the tide of bankruptcy, and to escape whom she had fled to the protection of the Church. The reader knows that portion of the plot in which the father and the senile wooer had by fraud separated their victim from the lover of her choice. This Donna Inez had kept from her husband.

All in ignorance of the terrible reception that awaited him the lover-husband approached his home.

From a servant he learned that his wife was in an arbor at the back of the villa, and leaving his guest in the parlor, he went in quest of her.

He thought it strange that she was not, as usual, on the watch for his return; but the terrible scene passing between her and Don Manuel Rubio had prevented her from hearing the approach of her husband's horse.

So he came upon her unawares.

All aglow with expectant love as was his heart, the shock of seeing his wife in the arms of a stranger, whose words showed that he was trying to persuade her to flight, while she clung to him unresisting, struck the husband dumb with dismay and bewilderment.

With a shriek the faithless wife tore herself from her lover's embrace, saying:

"My husband!"

Don Manuel Rubio became ghastly with a coward's pallor, and turned to fly.

His fear was not without good grounds. Into

the eyes of the outraged husband had come a slumbrous fire of resentment that teemed with death. Like lightning a pistol appeared in his hand and exploded.

In that instant the nature of the Spanish woman manifested itself.

Spreading out her arms she sprung between the two, crying:

"You shall not harm him! I loved him before I knew that you existed!"

But the words died on her lips, and she fell prone at her husband's feet.

The bullet intended for her lover's heart had penetrated her breast, thanks to her devotion; and the red ooze stained the bosom of her dress, while she lay limp and motionless.

With a cry of dismay, Harry Hazeltine dropped the fatal weapon, and stood gazing at his unconscious wife like a man turned to stone.

The thud of a horse's hoofs, as the lover sped away, he heeded not. He had thought—if he thought at all—only for the woman whom until now his hand had never touched save in kindness, who now, alas! lay at his feet, stricken down by that self-same hand!

There was a sound of hurrying feet, and Ned Taunton, followed by several servants, appeared on the fatal scene.

Donna Inez's maid cast herself beside the body of her mistress, crying:

"Wretch! you have murdered her! Ah! my sweet mistress!"

Ned Taunton took an altogether different view of the situation.

"Who has done this infamous deed?" he cried; and to the servants: "Scatter! Let not the murderer escape! He must be near at hand!"

And he would have headed the pursuit, but Hazeltine's hand fell upon his arm.

"Stay!" he said. "I did it!"

The astonishment of the young lieutenant at this *denouement*, so at variance with what he had been led to expect, was beyond words to express.

"You!" he cried.

"I!"

"Oh! impossible!"

"I did it."

"Why, Hal, my dear old friend, surely, you are beside yourself!"

"On the contrary, I have just come to my senses, after a year of delusion!"

The husband smiled a terrible smile to see. His eyes were like living coals. His face was ghastly and drawn. His voice was like ice in its utter lack of emotion.

Without comment, he pointed to a spur which lay on the ground, having been torn from Don Manuel's heel as he turned in flight.

A hot flush of indignation mounted to Lieut. Taunton's brow; and with only a glance of scorn at the faithless wife, he took his friend's arm, and said:

"Come! You must away from this. You're too good a man to suffer for bringing just retribution on such a wretch—"

"Hush! not a word against her!" said the husband, as he allowed himself to be led away. "I did not mean to harm her. She sprung before my bullet."

"And the scoundrel she protected?"

"I should not know him, were I to meet him within the hour. I saw only his back."

"There is nothing left for you, then, but flight. We may find a vessel about to sail, and get the start of the slow-going authorities."

"It is immaterial to me. Living or dead—what matters it? Perhaps the former is the more bitter alternative."

"Nonsense, Hazeltine! You must not let this spoil your life. You are young, yet. You can begin anew."

"Ha! ha!"—laughing bitterly—"I have an alluring prospect."

"Have you money at command? That's the principal thing in this world."

"Yes! yes!—gold is the only thing that never fails its possessor! I am fortunate enough to have ten thousand dollars now in bank, held on call, because I was on the point of making an investment of that amount."

"With expedition we may reach the city before the close of banking hours. Let us lose no more time."

Yielding himself to the direction of his friend, Harry Hazeltine was soon in the saddle, galloping toward Havana.

Their flight was witnessed by Don Manuel Rubio, who, after his first terror was passed, returned toward the villa to ascertain the effect of the husband's shot.

"*Maldito!* he has murdered her!" cried the Spaniard. "Fool that I am, I came unarmed, lest in my rage I should be tempted to harm

her! The result is, I was unable to protect her, and am now equally powerless to avenge her!"

With genuine emotion, he returned toward the house from which the husband had so lately fled.

He found the servants helpless in their confusion and dismay, Donna Inez's maid alone preserving some semblance of self-possession. She had brought cushions and got her mistress in a comparatively comfortable position.

Donna Inez was not dead, as Don Manuel had feared. A look of anxious love came into her eyes, as he bent over her, crying:

"Oh, my darling, you live! you live! How can I forgive myself? That I might not injure you in a transport of jealous fury I came to you unarmed, and so was unable to protect you—"

"Are you hurt?" she interrupted, thinking only of him whom she loved.

"No, no. Had I only received his bullet instead of you! But the murderer has fled."

"May he never return! He has struck at your life, and I hate him with the bitterness of death!"

"But, Inez, while he lives—here or at the remotest point of the earth—he will ever stand between us."

"Remove him, then!"

"Do you say it?"

"Yes! Would he not have killed you?"

"He will seek to fly from Cuba."

"Follow him."

"Ah! how can I leave you? You may die before my return."

"No, I shall not die. This wound has reached no vital part. Go! follow him to the ends of the earth; but avenge me!"

"I will! I will!"

"And, Manuel, let this inspire your arm: I love you, and only you. When he is dead, claim me."

"My darling! Those sweet words will ring in my heart and drown his cries for mercy!"

"Do not delay, or the opportunity may be lost."

"I go at once. Farewell, sweet Inez! With this kiss I seal our new betrothal!"

Holding the almost fainting woman close over his heart he pressed a lingering kiss to her lips, and then tore himself away, to go on his unhallowed mission.

CHAPTER VII.

VIKIR.

HAVING secured his gold and placed it in a trunk that its weight might not attract attention, Harry Hazeltine went along the quay in search of an out-bound vessel.

It mattered not to what port she was going. He only sought to get away from Havana.

After two hours' search, our friends found what would answer their purpose in the Donna Ysabel, merchantman, cleared for Montevideo, Anselmo Valanquez captain, and ready to go out with the turn of the tide.

They immediately repaired on board, Lieut. Taunton devoting the interval of two or three hours in a hopeless attempt to cheer his friend.

A terrible change had been wrought in Harry Hazeltine. So lately buoyant with the light-heartedness of youth, he all in a moment seemed transformed into a man old in the cynicism engendered by a long life of crushing disappointment and wrong.

He betrayed no anxiety to escape the consequences of his act—fatal as he supposed it. To the hopes and fears of life he was as one dead. He merely yielded passively to the direction of his friend.

Meanwhile an event was transpiring on shore which would have disturbed Lieut. Taunton's complacency, could he have been apprised of it.

Like at least a respectable minority of his fellow-men, Capt. Valanquez was not proof against fair words, alcohol and gold. These potent influences were brought to bear on him in the order named.

During their quest of a vessel our friends had been watched by a man whose features were effectually masked by a heavy beard and a slouched hat.

When their negotiation with Capt. Valanquez was completed, and they had departed for the vessel, the captain was approached by this individual, who accosted him politely, and engaged him in conversation.

In a few minutes they retired to a neighboring inn, where the stranger ordered wine, over which the new-formed friendship grew apace.

In due course the captain reached that state of inebriety when men swear eternal friendship for the first person at hand. Then the stranger, who gave his name as Pablo Garcia, said:

"*Amigo*, you are a man after my own heart."

"Your hand, my dear Garcia," interrupted the other, with effusion—"your hand! I swear that I love you as a brother. Would that we were not forced so soon to part."

"It is of that that I wish to speak to you. Why need we part? Your vessel has room for one more?"

"*Carrai!* It is yours to command. Moreover, I have just secured a prince of passengers. You shall have good company, I assure you."

"*Senor capitan*," said Garcia, mysteriously lowering his voice, "can I trust you?"

"Trust me?"

"*Doblones* sit well on the stomach at sea as well as on land?"

"*Por dios!*"

"A hundred pesos would not make your friendship less?"

"*Caramba!*"

"*Senor capitan*, mira!" (behold!)

And Garcia slightly disarranged his beard, which showed it to be false.

"*Santo dios!*" cried the Spaniard, under his breath, his contracted eyes and cunning smile indicating knavery ready at the hand of the manipulator.

"Who I am—what I am, it matters not," said the stranger. "I would be lost in the crowd. Be a little blind, and I will leave you a salve which is applied in the pocket. Let me ship among your crew. Believe me, I can clew up a bunt and take my trick at the wheel."

"*Diablo!*" cried the Spanish captain, with a knowing smile, "my crew are not all angels. What you leave behind you is none of my business, if you are willing to put up with what you find in my fore-castle. They ask for no certificate of character there."

"It is agreed, then. I will send my kit on board in half an hour."

Pablo Garcia was as good as his word. When he was rowed to the side of the Donna Ysabel in a wherry, he was arrayed in a regular sailor dress; and though he passed within ten steps of Harry Hazeltine, the latter did not so much as cast a glance at him.

The parting between Harry Hazeltine and Ned Taunton was marked with lively solicitude on the part of the latter, and dull, dead apathy on that of the former.

It was over at last; and the canvas was let fall and clewed home, and with the ebb-tide the Donna Ysabel set out on her voyage.

In the fore-castle, and aloft and alow, Pablo Garcia mingled with his fellows without attracting particular attention. He seldom had anything to say; but his "pigtail" was always at the service of every one and any one, and that won him favor.

During the long nights, in the calm moonlight, or when the tempest howled in its might, the sailors got accustomed to see a tall, silent figure, leaning with folded arms against the taffrail and looking out over the sea with eyes that seemed to take no note of anything. The silent passenger never spoke to any one except the captain, and that briefly, and at long intervals.

Such was the situation when early one morning came the hail from the mast-head:

"*Sail 'O!*"

"Where away?" returned the mate.

"On our weather beam, just clearing the point of yonder lagoon."

"What do you make of her?"

"A rakish craft, sir, bearing down on us under full sail."

"What is that?" demanded the captain, appearing at the companionway.

Taking a glass from the rack, he sprung into the shrouds, and bent a brief scrutiny on the stranger.

"*Santissima!*" escaped from his lips, as, with unwonted pallor, he dropped to the deck.

"All hands on deck! Rouse, ye sleepers! Tumble up! tumble up! lively! Lay aloft, ye top-men! Set stun'sails! Shake out every rag the spars will carry! Helmsman, put her before the wind! *Ridalgo*,"—to his mate—"distribute the arms, and get the ammunition in readiness. That devil means mischief; and before sunset such as are left of us may have to walk the plank!"

"A pirate?" asked Harry Hazeltine, without the betrayal of any emotion.

"*El Basandro!*" declared the captain, naming a much dreaded buccaneer; "the scourge of the Antilles!"

"Have you a spare cutlass and a brace of pistols for me, *senor capitan*? I will not dishonor them, I promise you."

There was a flash in Harry Hazeltine's eyes, like those of a war-steed which scents the bat-

tle afar. Aside from this he was a man of ice.

"Your aid is welcome, señor," replied Captain Valanquez. "If we are overhauled, we shall need every arm in our defense."

But even as the captain spoke the light wind began to fall; soon smooth, glassy surfaces began to appear upon the sea; and in half an hour the ships rocked in a dead calm.

Then from the sides of the pirate put out four boat-loads of armed men, and pulled straight for the merchantman.

By way of precaution against sea-rovers Captain Valanquez had provided his craft with a small swivel-gun. This was mounted on the quarter-deck; and when the boats of the pirate came within range, the captain began to try his skill as an amateur gunner.

His want of skill was soon apparent, and loud rung the pirates' yells of derision, while they drew even nearer to their intended prize.

At the moment when the captain seemed convinced that he was wasting ammunition, Harry Hazeltine stepped forward.

"*Señor capitán,*" he said, quietly, "I have served in the navy. Will you let me try?"

"*Gracias, señor!* May the holy saints direct your aim!"

Carefully he aimed the piece, making allowance for the roll of the vessel on the ground swell; then at the proper instant applied the match.

Ere the smoke lifted, a yell of anguish told that his shot had been effective. Then through the dissipating cloud could be seen a boat's crew struggling in the water, clinging to the oars and bits of their wrecked boat.

Without waiting to pick up their luckless comrades, the three remaining boats dashed forward, passed round the vessel under fire of pistols from her deck, and drew together under her bows.

Into the netting they sprang and gained a footing on the deck of the Donna Ysabel, in spite of the vigorous opposition of her defenders.

Then the fight waxed fast and furious. The rattle of small-arms, the clash of steel on steel, or the dull hack and gride as the quivering flesh was laid open to the bone; the curses and yells of the enraged combatants, and the groans of the dying; faces flushed with fury or ghastly in death; the struggle, the fall, the rising again to renewed combat—all these terrible sights and sounds turned the deck of the merchantman into a very pandemonium.

Ever in the thickest of the fight towered the form of Harry Hazeltine. With compressed lips, pale face and blazing eyes, his cutlass reeking with gore, cutting here and thrusting there, sweeping aside the blades directed at his breast and scattering or striking to the deck the wielders of them—he fought recklessly, desperately, spreading terror and death wherever he went.

It was his fierce assault that checked the rush of the enemy, and his rallying cry that brought back the retreating crew of the merchantman.

His left arm hung at his side, blood trickled from his finger-ends to the deck. From a wound in the head, blood streamed over his face, and neck, and garments, giving him a terrible aspect.

Still, inch by inch, the defenders of the ship were driven back to the quarter-deck.

Then, when all seemed lost, Harry Hazeltine sprang to the swivel-gun, which he had loaded with grape-shot for this emergency. To train it on the foe and apply the match was the work of an instant; and through the ranks of the pirates was mowed a swath that spread terror to their hearts.

Once more the hero sprang forward with reeking cutlass and ringing rallying-shout, to press home the advantage of panic. The pirates wavered, then turned and fled.

Back over the bloody deck they had so nearly conquered, disregardful of the dead and dying they left behind, those who could leaped from the bows of the vessel into their boats and pulled away for dear life.

On the fore-castle was left a youth who, supporting himself on one knee, defended himself feebly, yet without a show of fear, from the crew of the Donna Ysabel, who pressed him on all sides, eager for his blood.

He was evidently an Indian, native of the Antilles. His swarthy face was stamped with unusual intelligence, and his blazing eyes showed indomitable courage even in the face of death.

Half a score of cutlass-points sought his life. When Harry Hazeltine sprang within the circle and with his ensanguined blade swept aside the weapons.

"Hold!" he cried. "The fight is over. We are victorious. We cannot afford to turn murderers of the wounded!"

At this moment a pistol in the hand of the man who had shipped as Pablo Garcia exploded. Blending with shots at the retreating pirates, it attracted no attention.

Harry Hazeltine shivered, and seemed about to fall, but regained his balance.

"I claim this youth as my prisoner," he continued. "Captain, shall it be granted me?"

"Stand back, men!" cried the captain, who was a man of good impulses when not tampered with. "To Señor Hazeltine we owe our lives and the safety of our ship. You have all seen how he has fought. Before you all I wish to thank him, and, in testimony of our sense of obligation, to grant him this prisoner, to do with him as he likes. My men, a hearty cheer for *El Salvador del Donna Ysabel!*"

With right good will the crew tossed their caps into the air and made the welkin ring with their cheers of assent.

The youth pressed his lips to the hand of his deliverer, and said:

"*Eccellenza,* you are brave—you are generous. The life that Vikir would scorn to crave from a dozen foes in arms he accepts from you. Command me! I obey!"

And as we get a fair view of his face, we recognize the youth who, by the side of his dead father, swore vengeance on the abductor of his sister.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEVIL'S BIDDING.

WE return to the Creole cousins, Nina and Paola, with a word of explanation.

Crushed by financial ruin and the supposed suicide of his daughter, Don Fernando Mentoza had squared accounts all round by blowing out his brains, a tragedy which Harry Hazeltine concealed from his young wife until long after its occurrence.

After her breach with her husband, Donna Inez boldly sought her maternal uncle, Don Alfonso Careno, and concealing the fact of her marriage, stated that a year had been passed in the cabin of her maid's parents. Don Alfonso received her with open arms, as one returned from the dead, and by his influence the claims of the Church were nullified.

This Don Alfonso was an easy-going gentleman who had married an English lady, and mourned her untimely death ever since the birth of their only child, Paola. It was not until some years after the death of his wife that Don Alfonso met her brother, James Wetherby, who had lived in Australia. How they were brought together we will learn later in the story. Suffice it to say here, that although Wetherby did not show such traces of cultivation as his sister had, his brother-in-law received him with open arms, making him the superintendent of his affairs.

So cunningly did the Englishman cultivate the confidence of the ease-loving Spaniard that Don Alfonso shifted all the cares of business to the shoulders of one whom he had come to regard as tenderly as if he were a brother by blood. How blind was this trust will presently appear.

That Wetherby had grossly betrayed his benefactor the reader has gathered from his conversation with Nina, or Donna Inez. With this understanding we accompany him into the presence of his master.

When he entered the library Don Alfonso was pacing the floor with his hands clasped behind him and his head hanging on his breast. There were tears in his eyes and on his beard, and his face showed a depth of pain that was due to the bitter reflection that it was his wife's brother who had proved so unworthy.

"Sit down, James," he said, in a tone which showed no trace of anger, pointing to a chair facing his desk.

With a sort of sullen defiance in his pallid face the more marked as he saw the mood of the man he had wronged, James Wetherby took the seat designated.

Don Alfonso seated himself, fumbled nervously among some papers on the table, and glanced with troubled inquiry at his brother-in-law.

"James," he began, presently, in a mild, deprecating tone, "the most painful duty of my life devolves upon me to-day. I wish you to listen to me patiently to the end, and you will see that I shall deal as generously with your sister's brother as if he were my own—nay, more generously; for toward you I feel no bitterness—only unspeakable sorrow."

Clutching the arms of his chair, Wetherby sat regarding the floor with a gloomy frown.

Don Alfonso cleared his throat, to relieve the painful constriction, and went on:

"I need not recall the circumstances under

which I received you into my house. You came to me, the brother of one who was closer to my heart than any living thing save the image of herself she left to console me, who was inconsolable, when she took her flight to heaven.

"I loved you for her sake. I trusted you because I believed that no evil could be in any way associated with her.

"How I loved you, let my treatment of you for five years attest. How I trusted you, I have called you here to show.

"For five years you have had control of my affairs. After the first year I became satisfied of your ability—I never thought of questioning your integrity—and for the past four years you have been free from all supervision, except as you have seen fit to consult me, and your accounts have passed absolutely without inspection.

"James, I have trusted you further than that. I have before me a document whose blind—nay, criminal fatuity never impressed me until to-day. In my faith in you I would have done my child—the sacred charge she committed to my care with her dying breath—I would have done her child an irreparable wrong!

"I cannot read it to you in detail. Every clause, save such as attest my love for my helpless Paola, is a reproach to me. This is the substance of its provisions:

"By this document you would have become at my death the sole executor of my estate—the sole guardian of the person of my child! This paper gives you power to buy and sell at your discretion, unquestioned, and to convert to any use you should see fit, every *peso* of my child's patrimony! Why? Because I believed that you would guard the interests of your niece as carefully as I would guard the interests of my daughter. God forgive me for the dereliction growing out of my faith in you!

"But this is not all. Oh, a malignant fiend must have possessed me!

"Not content with delivering my child up to your tender mercies, bound hand and foot, I have placed before you every inducement to prove recreant to the trust. If my child marry contrary to your will, she forfeits her patrimony, and you continue to hold it in trust until her children come of age!

"My thought was to restrain her from an unwise alliance, at least until the attainment of her majority should have given her that experience of the world which would enable her to protect herself from fortune-hunters. But, alas! what a field for intrigue did I leave open for you, if you proved aught short of the soul of honor!

"James," proceeded the old Don, with an excess of pain in his tones, "thus have I loved and trusted you. How you have requited my good-will I leave to your conscience. For her sake, James"—and his voice sunk almost to a whisper—"I have no wish to humiliate you by the sad recital.

"I have said that in the place of manifesting, or even feeling resentment toward you, I should treat you generously—always, remember, for her sake. James, you are free to go unquestioned. The world shall know nothing of your wrong-doing. More than this, I shall grant you a life annuity of one thousand *pesos*. By placing you above the temptations of want, this will give you time to reflect on the past; and I hope you may be led to a better life.

"For your ingratitude to me I forgive you. This is a bitter moment to me, James. I had hoped—I can say no more!"

Overcome by his emotions, Don Alfonso touched the bell to summon his servant, and dropped his head upon his arm on the table.

During the foregoing recital James Wetherby had sat pale and silent, looking anything but repentant. There was nothing in his nature to be touched by the magnanimous grief of his master.

When Don Alfonso ceased speaking the superintendent started to his feet, as if about to leave the presence of the man he had wronged, but remained before his chair, irresolute.

The door opened, and Don Alfonso's valet appeared in answer to the summons.

As we have said, this servant had a look of haughty reserve, like one who galled under the yoke of slavery, the bitterness of which his superior intelligence fitted him to feel most keenly.

At sight of him, all that the temptress had said recurred to James Wetherby. *Slay both master and servant, and lay the death of the former to the charge of the latter!*

By reason of his grief, the old Don was helplessly off his guard. On the table, beneath his arms, lay the will, yet intact. And within

reach, as if placed there by some malignant devil, lay a curiously-wrought stiletto, used only as a paper-knife.

To think—to act—were the events of a second.

Before Don Alfonso could look up to charge his servant, James Wetherby seized the dagger and planted it to the hilt between the shoulder-blades of the bowed man.

"James, for God's sake—"

Don Alfonso started up and stared into the face of his murderer with a look of amazement, terror and unspeakable reproach, that left an indelible impress on the soul of this demon of ingratitude, and, for the time, drove him to a frenzy of desperation.

Again the reeking knife descended, plunging into the neck of its victim and severing the jugular vein at a blow, cutting short his appeal.

Don Alfonso's last thought was of his child. He stretched forth his hand to destroy the will; but death paralyzed it on its way.

This tragic scene was enacted all in an instant, as quickly as two blows could be given. The valet, who had reached the middle of the room, was struck dumb with dismay. Knowing the brotherly relations that existed between these two men, he could not realize for a moment that one had actually murdered the other.

Only an instant; and then he did a most natural and yet most fatal thing. Not thinking of the necessity of self-defense, he sprung forward to prevent a repetition of the blows that were all-sufficient.

Like a flash the infuriated murderer was upon him, and felled him to the floor with a blow of his fist. Then dropping upon the body of his second victim with his knees, in a way intended to crush his ribs and so do vital injury, Wetherby clutched the valet by the throat and raised and thrust his head against the floor repeatedly, with such violence as to fracture the skull.

Taking the stiletto, the murderer drew its keen edge across his own cheek, so that it would look as if the valet had struck at him; then threw the weapon upon the floor beside the scapegoat of his devilish crime.

A sound like a hoarse, rasping exhalation reached his ear. Looking up he discovered Donna Inez standing in the doorway.

With a devilish laugh he waved his hand toward his victims and said:

"Behold our work—yours and mine!"

The girl was paralyzed with horror at the execution of what her own mind had plotted. Without a word she fell forward in a swoon.

When the superintendent told his story, that in an ebullition of anger the master had struck his slave to the earth, then with a passing vertigo had sunk into his chair with his head on his desk, and so by his helplessness drawn the vengeance of the haughty slave upon himself, whereupon the brother-in-law had sprung upon the murderer and slain him in his wrath, justice said that his hand had only anticipated her blow, and held him acquitted of blame.

From her pleasure trip Paola returned to hear the story of her father's tragic death, and to lie in a paralyzing transport of anguish in the arms of her false cousin, not able to follow her words of condolence, yet, in a measure, soothed by that sympathy which is balm to every crushed heart.

Doubly intrenched behind their relationship and hypocrisy, who would unmask her heartless foes, and save her from their rapacious greed?

CHAPTER IX.

HURLED TO DEATH.

THE pirates were beaten off. With the decline of the sun a breeze sprung up, and the Donna Ysabel resumed her way.

On deck, in the calm moonlight, Harry Hazeltine lay in a hammock. His head was bandaged, and his left arm rested in a sling. A hail had struck the shoulder-blade and glanced, leaving a painful, but not dangerous wound.

Near at hand, the Indian youth, Vikir, leaned against the bulwarks, looking wistfully out over the sea, yet ever on the alert for the lightest movement on the part of the man to whom he owed his life.

Watching him, Harry noted the elegant symmetry of his form, the proud carriage of his head, and the steady fire of his eye.

"Vikir."

"Eccellenza!"

"I have been wondering how you came to be with *El Basandro*. You were cut out for better work than that."

A flush swept over the bronze cheek of the youth, and then receded, leaving a sort of yellow pallor. His features set in hard lines of hate.

"Who shapes his destiny?" he asked, in a deep voice. "The gods lift us toward the light, or hurl us into the darkness, as they will."

"But natures like yours are out of place among a lot of cutthroats, who would take a life for a peso."

"Vikir became a pirate, not for gain, but for revenge!"

"You have suffered wrong?"

"Such as only blood can wash out!—the grave hide!"

"Will you tell me the story?"

"Eccellenza has the right to know. Of my father I need only say that he was chief of the island in which we lived. As he was the strength of our home, so was my mother its warmth, and my sister, Kalma, its light. There we lived in peace and happiness, until the Demon tempted my father, and the curse of our race fell upon him."

"Dismiss this gloomy superstition from your mind, Vikir. Curses have no effect on life. It is but a device of priestcraft to rule men through their fears."

"Listen—then judge!"

"A hundred years ago, the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf, and the ocean outside of the Antilles were ravaged by a pirate at the sound of whose name all men trembled. His only god was gold. To obtain it he spared neither man nor woman. Infancy and old age, innocence and beauty, went down before his sword, until every coin or gem that passed through his hands reeked with blood."

"That he, the robber, might not in turn be despoiled, he hid his ill-got wealth in the small islands of the Antilles—a little here and a little there, so that even if he were traced to one cache, or it were discovered by accident, his countless treasure would not be appreciably diminished."

"So suspicious was he that he trusted no one: but leaving his vessel, he would go alone and in secret, in a small open boat, to some secluded isle, and there bury his gold."

"So, one fatal day, my ancestor discovered him. A fight ensued, and the pirate chieftain fell. With his dying breath he laid a curse on his slayer and all his race, whoever dared to touch the gold for which he lost his life."

"And do you think, Vikir," here interrupted Harry, "that the Great Spirit who watches over us all would grant the prayer of a man whose soul was steeped in the blood of the innocent, and that to protect the gold for which he had murdered them?"

"Who shall say? Perhaps the Demon fulfills the curses of them that serve him."

"In despite of the Beneficent Spirit?"

"Who shall say?" again answered the Indian. "Listen—then judge!"

"My ancestor was so impressed that he returned home and never disturbed the accursed gold. But he handed the legend down to his son."

"He had not been present at the invoking of the curse. He thought his father a credulous old man. For gold he would dare the Fates."

"Communicating the secret to his son, he sought the island, found the treasure of gold and precious stones, and bore it home. The knowledge of his wealth soon spread, and tempted the cupidity of a marauding band of robbers from a neighboring island, who scoured the island of my ancestor with fire and sword, killing him and all his race, save his youngest son, who was preserved as by a miracle. But the treasure they could not find; for it was securely hidden."

"Awed by this fulfillment of the curse, the son restored the treasure; but his son, being grown to manhood, once more scoffed at the legend, and tempted fate."

"He sought the pirate's hiding-place; but while he was digging up the treasure a storm arose, and his canoe was washed to sea, leaving him with no means to quit the island save by swimming."

"Having no prospect before him but starvation if he remained on the island, he plunged into the sea and swam with the vigor of a strong man. Within sight of his home he became food for sharks!"

"Coincidences, Vikir," interposed Harry. "Everything is explainable by the ordinary course of events."

"Hold!" said the Indian. "One more disregarded the curse—my father! To placate the gods—if they indeed guarded the treasure—my father thought to make use of the beauty and innocence of my sister, Kalma. Her hand should dig up the gold, and the curse would fail."

"I cannot tell you the pain with which I saw

them depart—my father, my mother, my sister—all that I held dear on earth!

"They went—I waited."

"Night fell."

"They came not back!"

"Ere the morning dawned a storm burst in its fury. The heavens were like night; the sea was a tossing caldron, as black as the pigment with which we mourn our dead."

"In my canoe I braved the terrors of the deep, and found them—those that were left!"

"My father lay dead on the strand. Beside his body my mother mourned in inconsolable widowhood. My sister—ah, where was she?"

"Had she too been dead, we would have mourned her; but we would have had her among us. We would have known that she was at peace."

"Alas! the hand of the ravisher had snatched her from us! What was her fate? What has she suffered? Where is she now?"

"Crushed by this double blow, my mother sunk into the grave. *I lived for revenge!*"

"The curse had been again fulfilled: but I might strike the instrument of its fulfillment. Knowing only that he was an Englishman, I swore an oath to hunt all of his nation, and to spare none!"

"For this I joined the pirates; and for a year I have executed my oath, until fate gave my life into your hands, and you—"

"By the law of my fathers, *eloma* the ship rs. You command—I obey!" *I had to sew up a*

"Then my will is absolute to go—"*all things?* *add gain, with a*

"To the rendering up of my life to angels, you claim it."

"My first injunction, then, *one of humani-* ty. I command you to forego our oath so far as it involves the innocent. *ad* you ever meet the man who wronged you so deeply, then wreak your vengeance on him without restraint."

"But I do not know him."

"It may be revealed to you *the Indian bowed in submission—his steps or*

"I still think the fulfillment *had much acci-* dental," pursued Harry; "*but of* your convictions on that head *lazeltine and*

While speaking to the Indian *only solicitude* pressed every manifestation *and dead apathy* the story of outrage, coming *for* his own great wrong, filled *be* anas was let indignation. Now he looked *the ebb-tide the* the sea. It seemed as if all *poige*

vided between the wronging *at* allow, Pablo

Vikir, regarding his master *without attract-* had tacitly sprung up between *from* had any- ered something of the under *as* always at and this bond of sympathy *gone, and that* sentiment of allegiance in his *h*

On the fore-castle of the vessel *on moonlight* man with folded arms, silent and *its* might, visibly on duty, yet furtively watching *silent* figur His brows were contracted by a gleam *the taffar* his eyes glowed with a slumberous *eyes that art* swelled with hate. It was Pablo *The silent He* bided his time!

It came in the lash of the *the intervals, he* howling gale and the swashing *the morn-*

All day long the red sun *had* ough a saffron sky. As it approached *in* zon a sudden chill pervaded all the *and* at a certain temperature will freeze *red* or *on a* slight jar.

Then from all points of the compass the clouds began to gather, black, as night, with jagged, foam-white fringes, rushing hither and thither across the sky, propelled by a hundred varying gusts.

While this ominous commotion was apparent in the upper air, the sea lay dead, a plain of glass, and not a sound was audible.

But suddenly a long line of foam stretched half around the horizon, as if a tide of destruction were bearing down upon the doomed vessel. Then from the circumambient air came moans and sobs, as if from restless spirits.

A moment, and the gale bore down in all its fury. With a groan the vessel heeled over on her beam-ends, and the spray dashed over her and swept on.

As was his wont, Harry Hazeltine stood on deck, watching the gathering tempest.

Pretending to secure a coil of rope which hung from a belaying-pin, Pablo Garcia managed to get near him.

When the gale struck the vessel it was as dark as night, but a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the deck with a lurid glare. It discovered the treacherous Spaniard in the act of falling against Harry Hazeltine.

Taken unawares, the latter was hurled over the bulwarks into the raging sea. His despair-

ing cry struck terror to every heart, and was then snatched away by the gale.

But another cry followed—a cry of rage, as well as despair; and Vikir shot forward like a thunderbolt, grappled the murderer, and the two went over the side together, so swift followed vengeance on a most dastardly crime.

Then through the ship rung the dismal cry: "MAN OVERBOARD! MAN OVERBOARD!"

And as the ship staggered back to an upright position, ready hands cast a wooden grating and other things that would float into the sea, to give the wretches who were hurled into that raging waste of waters at least one poor chance for life.

Then dripping with brine, and with his face stamped with the ghastly pallor of a man who had stood face to face with death, Pablo Garcia reappeared over the bulwarks. He had saved himself by grasping a lucky line; but Vikir was gone to join his master.

The sailors gathered about their comrade with cheers of congratulation, and listened while he told how the passenger of the Donna Ysabel had been swept overboard, the victim of his own heedlessness—how Vikir, with the strange devotion of his race, had sought to leap after his master—how he, Pablo Garcia, in trying to deter this self-immolation had lost his own footing, and gone over into the yawning hell of waters to save himself only by the fortunate chance of having clung to the line he was in the act of coiling.

When Capt. Valanquez rewarded Harry Hazeltine's valor by giving Vikir's life to him, the sailors had applauded with right good-will. Later, looking at their dead comrades, their resentment toward the youth who had been associated with pirates returned, and even extended somewhat to the man who had interfered to preserve his life. Now that accident had linked them in a common fate, the superstitious sailors were ready to see in it a supernatural execution of justice, and so were disposed to accept Garcia's story with no over-close scrutiny.

But Capt. Valanquez called Pablo into his cabin and said, scanning him suspiciously.

"Why did you come on board my vessel? You are no sailor."

Drawing himself haughtily erect, and paying his captain a glance, which showed that, if sailor, all, he was certainly no common foremast hand, he said, in measured tones, and with the gravity of accent of a cultivated gentleman:

"There will never be a claimant for Senor Hazeltine's trunk. If you will take the trouble to look into it, you will not be disposed to ask me ugly questions, being assured that I shall forget you all the events of this voyage as soon as I quit your vessel."

A swift frown mounted to the Spanish captain's temple, and he bowed with marked respect, showing that he sold out to the devil on the spot without knowing the amount of the purchase-money.

A smile of cynicism and contempt curled Pablo Garcia's bearded lip; and turning on his heel, he left the cabin without more ado.

"Now," he muttered, "for Inez and happiness!"

CHAPTER X.

THE CASTAWAYS.

To be hurled into the seething ocean in the midst of a tropical storm is, practically, to stand in the open gateway of the Great Hereafter.

Plunging head-foremost into the yawning abyss, Harry Hazeltine's first sensation was one of abject terror. As he felt the cold waters close over him he experienced the calm of despair in the conviction:

"All is over!"

He felt content to drop the burden of his wrecked life, and accept what the future held in store.

Nevertheless, as he came again to the surface he struggled instinctively to preserve the vital spark over which nature makes us enforced guardians, in spite of our philosophy.

By a flash of lightning he saw the grating thrown overboard; and buffeted as he was by the waves whose crests at every moment broke over his head, he struggled toward it.

In the darkness his shoulders came in violent contact with the float, and though he nearly fainted with the pain, for his wound was far from well, he clutched the frail support, and after painful effort drew himself upon it.

Nearly exhausted he lay on his raft, for the present out of danger of actual drowning, though the spray was blown so continuously

over his head that it was difficult to get breath.

Of Vikir's share in his fate he knew nothing. Straining his eyes, he saw the ship disappear in the gloom. Then he experienced the full force of those lines:

"Alone! alone! all, all alone!
Alone on a wide, wide sea!"

To die away from all mankind, unwatched, unwept, forgotten!—when even God seems to stand afar off: then the soul feels its desolation!

So Harry Hazeltine waited, until the sea rose in its might, tossing the frail waif about in seeming contempt. In their rude sport the waves dashed against the clinging man, then plucked at him, then tipped his raft this way and that, until, his benumbed fingers relaxing their hold, he was torn away and hurled down! down! down! where all that was terrible faded into a delightful dream. Light and warmth and beauty surrounded him; fragrance greeted his nostrils, and exquisite music soothed his ear, while he floated in a realm of enchantment.

Then came sudden oblivion!

Over the smiling tropical sea rose the sun. Though the billows rolled high, their crests were round and smooth, not tumbled into white-caps by the following gale.

In mid-ocean a green islet parted the waters. All round it, at intervals, the tide being low, appeared the crest of a jagged reef in the trough of the waves. But the islet itself was bordered by a broad beach of yellow sand, over which the breakers swept and receded.

Beyond the reach of the lowering tide lay two bodies—one on its face, one on its side. They were men, to all appearance dead. Sand was in their wet garments and in their hair. One had the fair complexion of the Northern clime; the sun-touched cheek of the other proclaimed him a child of the tropics.

They were Harry Hazeltine and Vikir, cast up by the sea.

Neither was conscious of the vicinity of the other, nor, indeed, of his own existence. They lay perhaps an eighth of a mile apart.

The sun rose higher in the heavens, casting its warm rays on the bodies. At the same time the tide began to return, every seventh wave rising a little higher than its predecessors.

The sun sought to revive; the sea jealously sought to reclaim its victims.

Presently Vikir's breast rose with a perceptible inhalation. Then a sigh escaped his lips. He lived!

The sun was doing its work. But the sea also came nearer and nearer. It was a race between the benevolent and malevolent forces of nature.

A wave mounting higher on the sands than its fellows, washed his hand. The man heeded it not.

After a space another swell came tumbling in, breaking into yeasty foam, and running higher and higher, until it washed the unconscious face of the ocean waif. A shudder ran through the man's frame. He moved uneasily, so that he lay supine, and opening his eyes, gazed vacantly into the blue sky above.

Another wash of the sea swept round him, almost strangling him, yet at the same time startling him into a more vivid consciousness. He rose to a sitting posture, and gazed about him in bewilderment.

The first instinct was self-preservation. He rose with difficulty and staggered higher on the beach, out of the reach of the incoming tide.

Then came recollection, laboriously at first, but more clearly as exercise quickened the torpid pulse.

He brushed his hand across his forehead, and gazed anxiously out over the sea, then along the beach, until his eye was arrested by a dark object about which the waves were beginning to wash.

With a cry he started forward, his step becoming firmer, his pace quicker, as excitement lent him strength.

Nearer and nearer he drew, until with a great cry of pain he cast himself beside his unconscious master, turned his face to the light, and gazed in despair upon its ghastly immobility.

To drag the body up the sands to the shadow of the palm trees was a work of loving respect, rather than of hope. Then to attempt such simple means of resuscitation as were at command, was merely following the impulse to leave nothing untried.

But Harry Hazeltine's life-work was not yet done; and reluctantly, yet steadily, nature resumed her functions.

Vikir's delight was unbounded. It attested the deep love he had conceived for the man to whom he had just repaid the debt of a life.

Harry took up his life again without complaint, yet without joy. For him existence had no attractions, yet he did not shirk its burdens. Such a life is a dreary desert of tolerance.

Nature demanded food and drink. In quest of them the castaways resolved to explore the island.

Food abounded on every hand, in the form of fruit, and birds, and small animals, but water, fit to drink, was not so easily found.

There was high ground at one end of the island, and near its base Harry expected to find sweet water. Thitherward, then, the explorers bent their steps, until Vikir suddenly stopped and clutched his master's arm, with a sharp ejaculation:

"*Excellenza, mira!*" (behold!)

And he pointed excitedly before them.

"Why, it looks like a piece of canvas hung between the trees!" exclaimed Harry.

"*Excellenza*, we are not alone!"

"Let us hasten, then, to meet our friends."

"Our enemies!"

"Nonsense! All men are friends cut off from the world on so small an island."

"Pardon, *excellenza*! No place is too small for murder!" said the Indian, bitterly.

But Harry was hurrying forward.

As a precaution Vikir broke off a small sapling to serve as a cudgel, and hastened to place himself beside his master.

"It is a human habitation, but deserted," said Harry, as they came upon a sort of bower, formed by a tree bent beneath the burden of a heavy vine, this natural shelter being evidently perfected by human modifications, and the entrance curtained with an old sail.

"The owner has not long been gone," said Vikir, picking up the remains of freshly-eaten fruit.

"Let us indicate our presence, then," said Harry. "The poor castaway will be delighted to know that he has company to relieve his solitude. Come, let us halloo together."

Together they woke strange echoes among the palms, frightening the birds and animals; but though they waited nothing came of it. Then they went about the island, calling in English, and Spanish, and French, and German, which exhausted Harry's command of the languages, but to which Vikir supplemented his native tongue.

When this proved fruitless they concluded that the other tenant of the island was avoiding them in fear. Perhaps he had been alone so long as to become a stranger to his kind. They must find him in his hiding-place, and assure him of their amity.

Having slaked their thirst at a trickling rill, they began their search, keeping each other in sight, so that nothing so large as a man could pass between, and so elude them.

Suddenly a human being started up before Harry and ran away in a wild panic. The dress consisted of a tunic made of sail-cloth. The long flowing hair proclaimed this poor creature a woman!

This end of the island terminated in an abrupt promontory, perhaps forty feet high, jutting out into the sea. The frightened woman was rushing straight for the verge of this precipice.

"A woman!" cried Harry. "For Heaven's sake, stop her! She will jump into the sea!"

With a sharp ejaculation in his own tongue, Vikir ran at the top of his speed to intercept the fugitive; but uttering shrill cries, she ran the faster, and before he reached her, plunged head-foremost from the verge of the cliff into the sea.

Without hesitation Vikir followed her example, shooting through the air like an arrow.

Harry, who had been outstripped in the race, reached the precipice in time to see the divers emerge from the water, while two lines of frothing bubbles showed their transits beneath the surface of the sea.

The girl instantly began to swim; but Vikir was equally prompt in pursuit. As the fugitive turned her head to glance over her shoulder in abject terror, he for the first time saw her face, and recognized her!

With a great cry, in which the intense emotion of his heart seemed to burst its way outward, he shouted:

"KALMA! KALMA!"

By this strong appeal the girl was arrested. Ceasing her flight, she turned toward him in bewilderment, supporting herself upright in the water.

In an instant he had his arms about her, crying plaintively, so intense was his delight:

"My sister, it is I—Vikir!"

She knew him at last, and her heart welcomed

him with a scream, as she threw her arms about his neck.

The Indian girl did not faint, as one of her civilized sisters might have done in such a moment; but the reaction of feeling threw her into a sort of transport, in which everything slipped from her apprehension save the consciousness that she held her brother in her arms; and her wild embrace was like to drown him, as with a bubbling cry he sunk beneath the water.

The moment demanded prompt action. Fearing to dive so far, Harry jumped from the cliff.

The sensation of passing through the air from so great a height was terrible and at the same time delightful. During the brief transit our hero felt as if all weight were annihilated, and he were floating in space; but when he struck the water it seemed as if he plunged down! down! to the very depths of the ocean; and long ere he returned to the surface he found himself gasping for breath.

A moment was lost in getting the water out of his mouth and eyes. Then he swam vigorously to the aid of the almost exhausted Indian youth, and between them they got Kalma ashore and revived her.

We pass over the touching scene of the restoration of these children of Nature to each other's arms, and their gratitude to him who had just saved them from a watery grave.

Kalma's story was soon told, the boat in which she had drifted to the island found half buried in the sand in a little cove, a sail rigged, and the perilous voyage to the main chain of the Antilles successfully accomplished.

Kalma was reinstated in the island home of her fathers amid great rejoicing, tempered by the knowledge that Vikir was resolved to follow the fortunes of his new friend and patron.

The pirate's hoard was dug up and proved of value, approximating a million dollars. Finding it impossible to persuade either Vikir or Kalma to touch what they deemed the accursed gold, and that otherwise it must remain unappropriated, Harry Hazeltine took possession of it, and made the Indians the only compensation in his power, by turning over to them all his wealth, previous to the acquisition of his treasure-trove. This consisted of property to which he had fallen heir in the United States. His life in Cuba and all that pertained to it he ignored.

Then, ever followed by his faithful Vikir, Harry Hazeltine became a wanderer over the face of the earth.

The master brooded over his wrecked life. The servant still hugged to his heart his revenge against an unknown man.

Eight years later Harry Hazeltine stood on the deck of a vessel as it steamed up to the levee at New Orleans. He was going to his destiny!

CHAPTER XI.

VOLCANIC NATURES.

ALONG Canal street—the Broadway of the Crescent City—sauntered, one pleasant afternoon, a man who impressed the beholder as one who never smiled.

He was symmetrical in build, erect in carriage, and had that repose of manner which marks a man of the world—a cosmopolitan, for whom life has no surprises.

In keeping with the fashion of the day, he wore patent-leather boots, in elegant contrast with his attire, which was white throughout, the material being what is known as "duck," the cut disarming the most fastidious criticism.

He was gloved, but carried no cane. A single diamond, of unusual size and brilliancy, flashing in his shirt-bosom, was the only article of jewelry anywhere visible on his person. He wore a felt hat, with a broad and gracefully curved brim. His hair, flowing *a la cavaliere*, was soft and fine. A drooping mustache of the same chestnut hue shaded his mouth.

His face we have left for the last. It was this that claimed a second look. The features were well formed, rather patrician in cast. But the face was emaciated—almost haggard, and was marked by a dead-white pallor, while his eyes burned with an almost painful brilliancy, yet at the same time had a dreamy, far-away expression in them.

This was Harry Hazeltine, after eight years of wandering over the face of the earth, in the vain effort to elude an unquiet spirit.

At a respectful distance Vikir followed his master, with that deference and devotion which often marks the semi-barbarian. Time had treated him kindly. However, it had not abated the fire of revenge, which he guarded sacredly while he bided his time.

At a street corner Harry met his old friend Taunton, who now had a command of his own. They had been together much of the time since Harry's arrival in New Orleans, and their greeting was that of friends who see each other every day.

"Just the man I was hoping to run across," exclaimed Taunton, with a cheeriness that showed that time had not damped his spirits. "Have you anything on the tapis for this evening?"

"No."

"Then come with me to a stag-party at Mr. Wetherby's—the great Mr. Wetherby, you know!"

And Taunton laughed at the flunkeyism which does homage to wealth.

"Have I heard you speak of him?" asked Harry, to whom the name was unfamiliar.

"Why, all New Orleans is ringing with Wetherby and his two wards. 'The Creole Cousins,' they call them. Haven't seen them yet, myself; but they are to be put on exhibition shortly, I believe, at the 'palatial residence,' etc."

"And Mr. Wetherby?" asked Harry, with the air of one for whom the ladies possessed no interest.

"Is a jolly Henglishman, ye know, from the top o' 'Aymarket, come to this blarsted country to astonish the natives. But he keeps a first-class cellar, they say, and one meets pleasant company at his gatherings. The business of the evening is *écarté* and the cultivation of good-fellowship."

"That is to say, a gambling and drinking bout?"

"Well, I suppose that's the Puritanical way of putting it. But I didn't know that you subscribed to the blue—"

"No, God knows!" interrupted Harry, bitterly. "But to-night I am not in the mood for a carousal. Ned, come to my hotel, and we'll pass the evening with nothing but a cigar, a glass of wine and our meditations, as we used to do at home—it seems a hundred years ago."

"All right, old fellow, if you prefer it. But I'm off, now, for the custom-house. Good-by!"

And, jumping on a passing street-car, the light-hearted fellow was gone.

With all the bitterness of his life suddenly called up by this breath of freshness, so to speak, out of his past, Harry Hazeltine gazed wistfully after the car that contained his friend.

He was roused from this painful reverie by a sharp, yet musical cry, and turned in time to detect a street *gamin* in the act of snatching a purse from the hand of a lady who had come out of a large dry-goods store before which he was standing.

With a quick motion Harry seized the hand that held the purse, gaining an imperfect hold.

The thief dropped his plunder, wrenched himself free, and disappeared around the corner.

With a courtly grace Harry picked up the purse and restored it to its owner.

"Oh, how can I thank you, sir? I was so frightened!" exclaimed the lady, raising to his a face whose wondrous beauty was enhanced by its pallor.

An instant they gazed into each other's eyes, and the color swept into Harry Hazeltine's face.

Without making any direct reply to her acknowledgments, he said, hurriedly:

"Allow me to hand you to your carriage before a crowd gathers."

Thanking him again with her eyes, and at the same time looking a little wonderingly at him, the lady stepped into the carriage, as he held open the door for her, with his hat lifted.

Not looking at her again, he closed the door of the carriage, and said to the coachman, rather peremptorily:

"Drive on!"

As the carriage was whirled away, Harry turned into the cross street, walking rapidly, with his hat slouched over his eyes.

Oblivious to the resentment of the people whom he brushed by almost cavalierly, the man strode on, his soul now torn by a terrible conflict. One glance from a pair of sweetly-be-seeching eyes had stirred his nature to its very depths—he, the misogynist; for the wrong of one of the sex had led this chivalrous soul to hate and distrust all women.

But all in a moment this barrier was broken down, or better, melted; and he stood face to face with the consciousness that he loved again, more fully, more spontaneously than before. Then the woman's distress had appealed to his sense of championship. Now, he loved for no reason save that his soul gravitated naturally and irresistibly toward its correlative.

His first passion the man had clasped to his heart as a priceless boon, and cherished blindly, without a shadow of misgiving, until at one fell

stroke his heaven tumbled in ruins about him. The second he fought with a frantic desperation, as he would elude a curse.

The signs of conflict did not escape the ever watchful Vikir, and he drew nearer his master, yet did not obtrude himself upon his notice.

So they reached the *Hotel St. Louis*.

Harry Hazeltine's apartments were three, *en suite*—a reception room, his bedroom, and another which no living being save himself and Vikir had entered since his occupancy. Before the door of the last hung a heavy curtain, and on the threshold lay a large rug.

Dashing his hat upon the dressing-table, Harry turned to his servant and demanded:

"Is everything in readiness?"

Mournfully, and with his eyes on the floor, the Indian replied:

"Si, *eccellenza*!"

"Then remember that I am at home to neither man nor devil!"

"Si, *eccellenza*!"

Harry swept aside the curtain and it fell behind him. There was the sound of the opening and closing of a door, and all was still.

With a great, tender distress in his eyes Vikir stood looking at the curtain. Then curling himself up on the soft rug, he lay as if on guard.

Meanwhile, a strange scene had occurred in the carriage into which Harry had handed the lady, the sight of whom had so perturbed his soul.

In avoiding a second look at her an important fact had escaped his notice. The carriage already had an occupant!

It was a lady as beautiful in her way as the one against whose fascinations the sad soul was struggling so desperately. Yet if the latter impressed the beholder with the gentleness of a fawn, the former had some of the fierceness of a panther.

At the moment of his meeting with Capt. Taunton she had seen Harry, and the effect on her was terrible. Her jaw dropped, and into her eyes came a look of wild, hunted terror.

She saw the foiling of the pickpocket, and then the man who inspired her with such fear approached the carriage to open the door.

Completely unnerved, the woman sunk back into the corner, with just enough strength to throw over her face the end of a light, zephyr shawl which she wore. Then she almost lost consciousness.

She was aroused by the motion of the carriage, and a silvery voice calling:

"Inez, have you fallen asleep? I have just had such an adventure! Such a gallant gentleman—Oh! dear, what is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

Paola Careno, for it was no other, had playfully snatched the shawl from her cousin's face, and been electrified by the terrible aspect of her rigid features.

With a mighty effort Inez got herself in hand, and in a choking voice said:

"Nothing—nothing of any consequence. A rush of blood to the head, I think. Do not be alarmed. I am better already. Let us get home as soon as possible."

"Had not we better stop for a doctor?"

"No!" replied Inez, almost fiercely, as she sat upright, now devoured by the impatience which counts no speed fast enough.

In a tone whose imperious sharpness startled her gentle cousin, she ordered the coachman to withdraw from the crowded thoroughfare and drive home with all dispatch.

Catching sight of Paola's wondering gaze, Inez reflected that she must control herself, and sinking back, she again covered her face with her shawl.

Pale with sympathetic concern, Paola took her cousin's hand and held it.

So they reached their palatial home, and ascended the broad marble steps together.

"Will you have a cup of tea, dear?" asked the gentle Paola at the door of her cousin's room.

"No, thank you," replied Inez, with enforced calm. "I shall be quite restored after a nap. Say nothing to any one."

And the door closed between them.

Now the woman was free from scrutiny, and her terrible passions might expend their force without restraint. Far from seeking the recuperation of sleep, she tore off her wrappings, while she paced the room, tossing them from her without regard to where they fell.

"It is he, and he is not dead!" she cried.

"An accursed destiny has brought him across my path again at this critical moment! And what follows? Exposure, and with it the loss of everything—everything! A breath to Paola and my influence is gone. I saw the influence she had over him. He will seek her out. And

he will defend her. I foresee the issue. He is destined to frustrate us all!"

Such were the reflections of this woman, while she strode back and forth with clenched hands, set teeth, blazing eyes, and panting bosom.

We leave her to return to Harry Hazeltine.

When he emerged from the room into which he had withdrawn, there was no change in him. The same war of emotions was raging.

Not looking at his servant, he passed through his sleeping-room to the outer apartment, closing the door behind him. Vikir remained within. He knew that he would be summoned when needed.

Alone, Harry began to pace the room, and so continued until the evening brought Captain Taunton. Then, like the closing of a visor, an icy calm settled down over our hero's agitated countenance.

They took supper in company. Afterward Harry said:

"Taunton, if you will not think me fickle of purpose, I will accompany you to see this Mr. Wetherby."

"All right, old fellow," said the facile sailor. "You'll get good wine, and a host who will drink you under the table, if you care to meet him in that way."

"That will suit my humor to-night to a T," said Harry. "If I don't put the hard-headed old Englishman under his own mahogany, and then pack him off to bed, it will be because he is a better man than I."

Though he was outwardly calm, within his soul he cried:

"I will take a plunge into hell, and see if she will follow me there!"

In this spirit he went *again to his destiny!*

So Fate leads us—so, blindly, we stumble on!

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE TABLE.

JAMES WETHERBY'S "stag" receptions were given at a club-house. They seldom comprised more than ten or twelve guests, and usually not more than half a dozen. They were merely reunions of *bon garçons*, gambling being an incident, not the aim of the gatherings. James Wetherby was too shrewd to throw his dearly-bought fortune into the maelstrom of gambling for gain. So it was understood that the stakes were merely nominal, to lend interest to the game.

On being presented to him, Harry found the typical English *bon vivant*, corpulent in build and of florid complexion—a man in whose jolly face his crimes had left no mark, save perhaps a certain restlessness of the eye.

"My dear Mr. 'Azeltine," he said, with effusion, "I am glad to meet you, sir—hexceedingly glad to number you among my friends. I hope, sir, that this may be the hinauguration of a henduring friendship. You are 'eartily welcome, sir—'eartily welcome!"

Vikir, having followed his master into the room, fixed his eyes on James Wetherby. They began to glow and scintillate; his nostrils dilated and quivered; and his lip twitched like that of a tiger-cat about to spring.

One of the gentlemen of the party coughed slightly behind his hand.

James Wetherby started perceptibly, though his face retained its smiling expression.

"Hallow me to present to you, sir, my hes-teemed friend, Mr. Hasa Dillingham," he said, with a deferential wave of the hand toward the gentleman who had coughed behind his hand.

Mr. Asa Dillingham arose and acknowledged the presentation with a bow which certainly lacked the grace of a polished gentleman, as he said, somewhat abruptly:

"Glad to see you."

If he was uncouth in speech and manners, he was simply repulsive in personal appearance. He was a man of large frame with a stoop in his shoulders which seemed out of keeping with his build. This threw his head forward, so that he looked out from under beetling brows with a pair of as wicked eyes as were ever set in a human head. But they had a puzzling expression, as if their fire had been quenched. One would have said that here was a cruelly violent man whose spirit had somehow been broken.

His face was clean shaven; and this disclosed the most repulsive feature about the man. His face was full, but it seemed an unhealthy, dropsical puffiness. His complexion was putty-colored, becoming a livid purple about the lips and eyes. This peculiarity was also noticeable at his finger-ends, as he had a trick of raising his hand to his mouth. The palms of his hands were yellow, with a strange velvety look, like

the belly of a toad. One felt that they must be clammy to the touch.

Toward this man Harry instantly conceived a creeping horror of aversion. Ignoring his extended hand, he bowed to him with ceremonious politeness, keeping his eyes fixed on his face.

As Harry took the seat designated by his host, Mr. Dillingham followed him with his eyes, and, putting his hand before his livid lips, coughed slightly.

That was the only indication of his chagrin, the only expression given to the deadly hatred which he conceived on the spot.

Looking at him, Vikir instinctively perceived this hostility, and from that moment no movement of Mr. Dillingham while in the company of his master would escape his vigilance, but ever his eyes returned to James Wetherby, and his hand fell upon the hilt of a concealed dagger, and his lips twitched as we have described.

"You will find us jolly dogs, Mr. 'Azeltine," said his host, "a lot of jolly dogs. We love good wine and good company. As 'ost I feel bound to meet hall comers, and drink them hunder the table, if they make any pretensions that way. It is the hinitiatory ceremonial of hour fraternity. I throw down the gauntlet to you, sir."

"I have never tested my powers of endurance in that way," said Harry, quietly; "but it were a pity to evade a challenge so gracefully tendered. If agreeable to you, I propose that the stakes of each loser go into a common pot, to be claimed by the last man above the board, and expended in a supper for the company as soon as we have recovered from the effects of the contest."

The fine sarcasm that underlay Harry's words were unperceived by his host. He was delighted with the scheme, and, beating the table with his hand, cried, in true English style:

"'Ere! 'Ere! 'Ere!"

The rest of the company declining to enter the contest, it was confined to Harry and his host.

Then began the game, these two drinking champagne, glass for glass.

Unknown to the other, each entered into this mad carousal to drown thought.

James Wetherby was haunted by a ghastly horror ever at his elbow in the person of Mr. Asa Dillingham.

Harry Hazeltine was maddened by an angelic smile that the wildest revel could not banish.

So the hours passed far into the night.

Harry sat with the same icy impassibility, the liquor having apparently no more effect on him than so much water.

James Wetherby was flushed, and showed signs of inebriety, but hung on with English bull-dog pertinacity.

"My motto is—'Never say die!' he said, as he emptied his glass, and filled it again with an unsteady hand. "Mr. 'Azeltine, sir, I'll say this for you: I've never met your hequal. If you're agreeable hi'm yer frien'till death! Pass yer glass, sir—pass yer glass!"

All the while Mr. Asa Dillingham sat like some hideous ghoul, regarding Harry furtively beneath his shaggy brows.

Vikir looked at his master sadly, and at James Wetherby with that ominous contraction of the eyes and twitching of the lips.

It was nearly daylight when James Wetherby's head sunk forward on the table. He struggled to an erect though unsteady posture, and while his watery eyes rolled dreamily about on the company, muttered:

"Don' throw hup the sponge yet. Hi'm goor fr—"

But here he toppled from his chair, his fall partly broken by one of his guests, and actually rolled under the table, where a succession of snores indicated his bestial stupor.

Harry immediately rose from the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I believe it only remains for me to assist in putting my late opponent to bed."

Congratulations and expressions of wonder at his endurance followed. If the gentlemen thought that there was anything degrading in what had passed, they kept their thoughts to themselves.

James Wetherby was duly tucked into bed by his successful competitor, and in the gray of the morning Harry Hazeltine went out into the cool, pure air, and stood under the paling stars with his friend Taunton. Then the first expression of bitterness escaped him.

"Well," he said, "the ennobling contest is done, and I am victor!"

After a pause of gloomy reflection, he pursued:

"I wonder if the fires of hell are as powerless to deaden recollection?"

Taunton walked on in silence. What could he say?

They parted, and instead of retiring to his rooms, Harry ordered saddle-horses, and accompanied by Vikir, left the city, following the course of the river.

When James Wetherby awoke from his bacchanal stupor he slapped his thigh and declared Harry Hazeltine a man after his own heart, and determined to make him the lion of a grand reception soon to be given by his wards. Thus he blindly drew upon himself a man destined to be his most formidable foe.

Meanwhile Harry was being led by the Fates. On his return toward the city he heard a piercing scream, and turned to see a capsized boat and a gentleman and lady struggling in the water.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HUMAN VAMPIRE.

It now becomes necessary to show the situation in the home of the Creole Cousins at this point in our story, and to do so will involve a retrogression.

The shock of her father's violent death so affected Paola that for days she lay in a very precarious condition. In consequence Don Alfonso's will was admitted to probate and went into effect without his daughter being fully informed as to its provisions.

That her supposed uncle, James Wetherby, was sole executor and her guardian, with full powers to act for her in everything, was about the sum of her knowledge. Concerning the clause making her inheritance contingent upon her marriage with her uncle's consent she was, for obvious reasons, assiduously kept in the dark.

That he might the better prosecute his plots against this unsuspecting girl, James Wetherby took advantage of a Cuban revolution as an excuse to remove to New Orleans. Here he procured an establishment and lived in elegance.

Of course Inez, his accomplice, and indeed the instigator of the act of treachery which had made his fortune, was of his household; and the money which was his only in trust supported her extravagance.

The infamous possibilities of this woman's nature had attained a sudden development, in the moment when she gave the rein to her hatred for her husband. Thrown upon her own resources, she had stepped forth at a single stride, an adventuress of the worst type.

For the wrong her father had done her in separating her from her lover, Don Manuel Rubio, she determined to take reprisals on whomsoever fate offered. The ties of kindred were as nothing before her supreme selfishness. Becoming Don Alfonso's amanuensis and secretary, she discovered the fatal will, and also James Wetherby's rascality, and resolved to manipulate the situation to her own advantage; with what success we have seen.

Left to herself she would have pushed matters to a conclusion, removed Paola from the path, and divided the spoils; but having to act through James Wetherby, she found an impediment.

This man was of a nature that would never act until pushed to the wall. It would be years before he would be called to account for his stewardship of Paola's money; and so he lived on in the present, deferring the day when he must again incur the risk of crime.

Inez had many a stormy scene with him in private; but he kept putting her off with the argument that Paola would one day fall in love with some one, and by judicious opposition from him and encouragement from Inez be led into an elopement, which would solve the situation for them without any risk.

But, though surrounded by suitors, Paola favored no one above another, and her twentieth birthday, a period far beyond the average spinsterhood of Southern women, found her still fancy-free.

But let us pick up another thread in the warp of our story.

From hurling his rival into the sea Don Manuel Rubio had returned, to claim the reward of his infamy.

But he found Donna Inez changed. Her aims in life had attained a sudden enlargement. Her passion for him had given place, in great degree, to a new ambition to reign in society.

He had not the means to gratify this wish; so she turned toward her cousin's fortune with a rapacious greed which crowded all the disinterested love out of her heart.

Moreover, as she listened to Don Manuel's story, she was seized with a presentiment that Harry Hazeltine was not dead, and that some day he would rise up and confront her.

Discouraged by her coldness, and by the impossibility of producing proof that Harry was really dead, Don Manuel threw himself into the Cuban wars, and for years led a life of hazardous vicissitude. But of late he had again sought out the only woman he had ever loved, and now hung around her in helpless attendance on her whims.

Such was the situation when the arrival of Paola's twentieth birthday made further delay a fatuous trifling with Fate.

Then Donna Inez took a stand. James Wetherby must act!

"But," said the false guardian, "we must have accomplices; and they must be our dupes, or they will make an 'ole in our fortune, besides hincresing our chances for making hacquaintance with stone walls!"

"Why are you in such terror of stone walls?" demanded Inez, impatiently.

Perhaps she spoke wiser than she knew; for Wetherby darted a startled glance at her, but recovering himself, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"It would be quite a change hafter the luxurious 'ome we 'ave enjoyed for the past height years—don't you think?"

"Bah! you are a coward as well as a fool!" cried Inez, angrily. "You would sit with folded hands until the last minute, and then try to run away from justice, no doubt. Now listen to my plan; and it must be acted on at once!"

"As it is customary in Cuba for parents or guardians to arrange marriages, you must exercise that right, being careful to select the most repulsive old man you can find. But Paola has lived long enough in the United States to prefer the custom here prevalent, which allows a young lady to make her own selection.

"I already have my eye on a young man of pleasing address, who is in love with her; and it shall be my business to persuade her that she loves him, or at least make her prefer him to the man you try to force upon her.

"By her elopement the young man gets what he wants; the old man loses what he never had a chance of getting; and we step into the property, as she steps out."

"My dear," said Wetherby, "for generalship you are hunsurpassed! Fetch hon your hold man, and the game begins!"

As if Fate answered their desires that day, Asa Dillingham made his appearance.

At sight of him, Wetherby nearly had a fit. Evidently he called up unpleasant memories.

Enjoying the consternation caused by his appearance, Asa Dillingham chuckled behind his hand, a horrible, gloating exultation.

With his livid lips and purple finger-tips, the dropsical translucency and clamminess of his skin, and his snake-like eyes, he looked like a human vampire.

"Who is this man?" demanded Inez, not taking the trouble to conceal her disgust.

James Wetherby was dumb.

Asa Dillingham answered for him.

"Tell her an old friend, Tom—a brother, in adversity, ye know! and destined to be more than a brother in prosperity! Ha! ha! Pal, you're deuced comfortable, here. I've come to stay!"

And helping himself to the most comfortable arm-chair in the room, Asa Dillingham sat down, as if he were indeed to become a fixture.

Turning to Inez he waved his hand toward the door and said:

"Young woman, we are two old cronies with some reminiscences to go over, and would be alone. That bashful fellow has lost his tongue, you see. I am confident that your presence restrains him. If you will allow me to deny myself the pleasure of your fascinating company for one hour, I will then settle down to the full enjoyment of it for an indefinite period."

With scathing indignation Donna Inez drew herself erect; but Wetherby sprung to her side, and seizing her by the arm tried to urge her toward the door, while he said rapidly:

"For God's sake, restrain your resentment! A word from him might ruin everything!"

"Hold!" cried Donna Inez, shaking herself free, and fixing her penetrating eyes on Wetherby's now purple face. "This man comes to you out of your past life?"

"It's useless to deny it," said Wetherby, helplessly. "It shows for itself."

"Then, sir," cried the woman, turning to Dillingham, "know that there are no secrets between this man and me. We are one in fortune and in aim. I demand to hear everything you have to say to and about him!"

Asa Dillingham rubbed his yellow palms together and smacked his livid lips as he gazed at Donna Inez after her determined stand.

"What, Tom," he cried, with a smile like a death's-head, "have you turned voluptuary in your old age? You sly old Turk! is it possible that you have caged such a bird? I thought it was one of your interesting wards."

"This lady is Donna Inez—not my ward, but her own mistress," said Wetherby, humbly.

"But, Tom," pursued Dillingham, gloating on Donna Inez's beauty with a look that was an insult, "you are cheek by jowl with such a peri! Demme! I don't know whether most to approve your taste or wonder at your good fortune! But she's a dangerous one, Tom, if she's wicked enough to associate with you. She's got the handsomest mask in the devil's green-room."

Chafing under this insulting criticism, Donna Inez burst forth:

"Stop, sir! Before you proceed further learn something of the person with whom you have to deal."

"My dear!" interposed Wetherby, plaintively.

"James Wetherby," cried the woman, imperiously, "sit down and cease to annoy me! Do you think that I am in a mood for trifling?"

Wetherby succumbed in a decidedly wilted state.

Dillingham chuckled behind his hand.

"She has you trained, Tom. Ha! ha! ha! She has pluck. I admire pluck."

Ignoring all that had intervened, Inez proceeded in her address to Dillingham.

"I know that you are a thorough-going villain of the meanest type. Knavery is stamped on your face; it leers from your eyes; it appears in every gesture and in the tones of your voice, in your petty tyranny over one who is in your power, and in your disregard of the commonest decencies where you think that you can trespass with impunity."

"She has penetration," interposed Dillingham, pursuing his analysis unmoved.

"Of James Wetherby," continued Donna Inez, "I know that his villainy is limited only by his cowardice and sloth. I know that his early life must have been a schooling for that which has come under my observation. You have intimated what I have long suspected, that he is an impostor."

"Now, sir, you may well believe that I would not betray so thorough a knowledge of this man's villainy without a purpose, since my neglect to denounce him commits me by implication to complicity with him."

"Such a logical head!"

"Nor would I thus openly criminate myself did I not forecast the future sufficiently to see that we three are destined to work together for the accomplishment of a common end; so that perfect frankness between us will not only be unavoidable, but safe, since loyalty to each other will be the only means of self-protection."

"Tom! Tom!" cried Dillingham, in delight, "she's a bold one, as well as a clear-headed and a handsome. And to think that she voluntarily takes me into partnership, the little queen of iniquity! Oh, I've dropped into—"

"Hold!" cried Inez. "Think of me as you like; but outwardly at least I demand that formal courtesy which is my due as a lady!"

"And by all the furies I accord it!" cried Dillingham, with a burst of admiration. "You are the only woman I ever respected. You haven't got the eternal whine, and I don't believe you're afraid of blood!"

"I am glad that we have arrived at an understanding so readily. Now for the story of this man's life. Let none of us have any advantage over the others."

"Ha! ha! ha! Tom, how do you like that?" laughed Dillingham. "But how in the world did you recommend yourself to such a thorough business woman without informing her of your early experience—your apprenticeship, Tom?—ha! ha!"

"Come!" cried Wetherby, at last stung into dogged defiance. "I see that this lady is determined to 'ave the story, and you're in a 'umor to tell it. So let's 'ave it hover and done with. I might as well trust 'er as you, and I'd trust the devil as quick as heither of you!" he added, roughly.

"You see, my lady, Tom knows me like a book."

"Sam—"

"Hold! Why not call me Asa Dillingham? I've had a choice selection of names in my time. My last is buried in a Cuban prison, where for eight years I never saw the sun. Some of my beauty—my delicate complexion, for instance!—I owe to this sequestration from the trials and temptations of a wicked world."

If this man was hideous under ordinary circumstances, when his bitterness took the form of jocularly he was simply monstrous.

"But, my friends," he pursued, "I have this advantage over you—while your secrets bid fair to become common property, neither of you know anything to my disadvantage to tell the other, and you have no means of compelling me to inform on myself."

"But to my story."

CHAPTER XIV.

A VILLAINOUS RECORD.

"THE principal characters of my story," began Dillingham, "are a lady—Mary Wetherby by name—"

"Donna Maria!" exclaimed Inez.

"Yes; that, I believe, is the Spanish of it, Mary Wetherby, a young lady of rare beauty, virtue and accomplishments; her brother James, a young man of promise; her father, a London tradesman, with a comfortable income and his villa in the suburbs; and Tom Kittridge a young man about town, a ne'er-do-well, a spendthrift, a— But I desist. His character will become manifest in the narrative.

"Tom Kittridge loved Mary Wetherby, or her father's money, which to a man of his sort amounted to pretty much the same thing. As they had lived next door neighbors from their infancy, Tom had the run of the house, and perhaps Mary liked him as well as she did anybody else, for he was a good-looking young fellow enough in those days.

"It was natural that Tom and Jim Wetherby should be fast friends, and that Tom, who had the most push, should show Jim some of London life.

"Now a man may play the very deuce in London and not be found out by his friends. Tom was bound to live himself, and determined to get his friend as deep in the mud as he was in the mire, so that he couldn't split on him; for *pater-familias* looked askant at fast young men, and Mary was a little saint.

"But it takes money to live; and therein lay Tom's little game. If he could get a hold on Jim, by inducing him to raise the *ready* by any of the crooked devices known to young men about town, he could shut up his mouth while he roped in the innocent and confiding sister, and through her hold the purse-strings of the old money-gatherer.

"Jim wasn't vicious, but he had to keep step with his associates or fizzle; and the first thing he knew he was in a corner out of which money afforded the only graceful retreat.

"Tom now produced a Jew who declared his willingness to advance the money on a *post-obit*; not exactly the thing with a tradesman's son, for of course there was no property entailed; but Tom knew the ropes, and had arranged things with this particular Jew in a manner which would have surprised Jim, had he been informed of the *modus operandi*.

"Now luck (as it frequently does in such cases) supplemented Tom's genius; for at that critical period *pater-familias* lay sick. Jim was thin-skinned, and objected that the thing would have an ugly look, the two facts coming into such suggestive conjunction; but, as Tom argued, the *post-obit* wouldn't affect the old gentleman's health either one way or the other, and it wasn't worth a rap until he shuffled off, etc., in due course of nature. Then Jim would have the wherewithal to take it up and put it in the fire, and nobody the wiser.

"So, like many a better man, Jim fell. He got out of one scrape, but he plunged over head and ears into a worse one.

"Did you ever play smut, where a greeny unconsciously rubs his own nose with lamp-black in the dark, and the light is struck so that the company gets the benefit of it? Well, the devil sometimes plays smut with his friends; and so it happened in this case. For *pater-familias* got well, and discovered the *post-obit* business, and a lot more. He naturally inferred that the scapegrace son had speculated on the mortality of his venerable progenitor, and in his indignation and grief disowned him and cut him off with the proverbial shilling.

"Of course certain irregularities in the conduct of Mr. Tom Kittridge came to light, which horrified the saintly Mary, and caused *pater-familias* to kick him (metaphorically) out of doors.

"After this derangement of his cunningly-laid plans and the consequent loss of business and social standing—for everybody kicks the man that's going down the hill—Tom openly went to the bad; and in the end fetched up at Botany Bay, with a striped wardrobe and a prize-ring hair-cut, all because of having accidentally signed the wrong name to a bit of pa-

per. A trifling circumstance to be productive of such startling results; but then, you know, 'great oaks from little acorns grow,' etc.

"As luck would have it, Jim Wetherby, being thrown on his own resources and finding advancement in the Mother Country up-hill business, set out for the New World, Australia, and after some rough knocking about, became a keeper in the prison where his old friend soon afterward arrived as—let us say, a guest!

"That there was no love lost between them may easily be inferred. Maybe Jim took advantage of their relative positions to grind Tom. Human nature as a general thing finds revenge palatable, when it can be had without risk; and a convict don't stand much chance to vindicate his rights, if imposed upon. Perhaps it was only Tom's pride chafing at his subjection to a man whom he had formerly led by the nose.

"But not to dwell too long on causes, Tom soon found himself branded with the queen's mark for total insubordination. It is a pretty device like this."

And on the back of a magazine which lay handy Asa Dillingham drew the following character:



"Soon after this Tom took it into his head that a change of air and scene would do him good, and in company with some others packed his valise and started to travel for his health.

"But they're an affectionate set out there in Botany Bay. They couldn't bear to part with one about whom clustered such tender associations. They hunted him up, offered irresistible inducements to him to come back, and for fear that he might get lost again stamped him on the other shoulder-blade with the runaway's mark.

"Here you have it. A pretty letter—eh?"

And he traced this:

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"But Tom's bump of habitativeness must have been wretchedly deficient; for it seems that he determined once more to roam. One of the guards was so importunate in his petition that Tom should not leave them to mourn him disconsolate, that Tom, out of pure kindness and merely to put the tender-hearted fellow out of his misery, tapped him on the head with a tamping-iron, and persisted in his willful purpose.

"They are famous jesters at Botany Bay; and they called this purely humane act a murderous assault on the guard. If Tom had waited—but he didn't!—they would have carried out the joke by setting him to dance on nothing, with a hempen necktie around his neck; or else they would have presented him with a set of iron jewelry, twenty-four carats fine, and allowed him to amuse himself at a game which they call 'hard work in chains for life.' In the latter case they would have added another meritorious mark, putting it on his back, like the title of a book.

"This distinction is only granted to one who carries off the highest honors:



"You see, it is the sign of the Cross: but it has no religious significance.

"With characteristic modesty Tom declined the honors he had earned, and sought to cover his bashfulness by losing himself in the crowd. But his admiring friends sent Jim Wetherby over land and sea in quest of him; and Jim's zeal was rewarded by finding his old chum at Galveston, Texas, employed on an honest trading vessel.

"Tom was so little vainglorious that it was found necessary to put him in irons, lest he should continue to hide his light under a bushel. But this shrinking from the plaudits of the crowd had become a monomania with Tom, and on the passage from Galveston to Havana, where they expected to ship for the antipodes, he erected a monument to modesty which is without parallel. Would you believe it?—to escape the testimonials of a grateful country he jumped, irons and all, into the sea! This while he was allowed his daily exercise on deck.

"But for the testimony of the officers and crew of that honest trading vessel, I wouldn't believe it myself!

"Meanwhile Jim's father had died, and also his sister, after having married a Spanish

grantee. You know how Jim found his brother-in-law in Cuba, and, accepting his offer, threw up the keepership of the prison in Botany Bay.

"But now behold a strange anomaly. Jim is in turn seized with a mania. He insists that he is Tom, and Tom is Jim!—that Tom, finding himself pursued, inveigled Jim on board a ship manned by a crew of villainous cutthroats, all in his (Tom's) interests; and that Jim (and not Tom) was ironed and thrown (not jumped) into the sea. As Mary was dead and Don Alfonso Careno had never seen Jim, and all who knew him were at the other side of the world, the cunning Tom (so runs his mania) boldly stepped into Jim's shoes, and from his long intimacy knowing as much about Jim's family and friends as Jim did himself, and furthermore turning his old skill at forgery to account by imitating Jim's writing, he had no difficulty in imposing on the credulous old Don.

"Did you ever hear of such lunacy as that, Donna Inez? I call him Tom to humor him. But, old fellow," pursued the ironical Dillingham, addressing his victim playfully, "I'd never believe your own testimony against yourself until I saw the brands which I have described on your back."

All through this cruel story the false James Wetherby had sat mute, trembling and with the perspiration starting in his palms and on his forehead. Now he faced Dillingham's devilish smile and Donna Inez's undisguised contempt with defiance.

"Well," he said, "the story's all hout. You hought to know which man went into the sea, since you were the captain of the vessel from the deck of which 'e was thrown."

"That is the only point on which the dear boy is thoroughly rational," laughed Dillingham.

"It seems, then," said Donna Inez, looking from one to the other, "that I find myself in the elevating society of an escaped convict and an honest trader, who throws men into the sea, and then gives perjured testimony?"

"Exactly!" assented Dillingham, unblushingly. "But if we serve your turn, my lady? And then, perhaps, you are a greater devil than either of us."

"Waving all metaphysical points of distinction," said Donna Inez, "Asa Dillingham, you are just the man that we want. I move that we proceed to business."

And the three set themselves to the work of plotting against the innocent lady Paola.

CHAPTER XV.

BIRDS OF PREY.

AT twenty, Paola Careno was the full realization of a poet's dream of womanhood.

From her English mother she inherited her fair complexion, her soft, fine blonde hair, and that hardy constitution for which English women are noted. But by her southern blood, the rather heavy Saxon build had been toned down to lines of exquisite symmetry, and every movement was instinct with a pliant grace, while her voice was attuned to the mellow cadence of Iberia. Combining the strong passionate nature of a daughter of the tropics, with the retiring sensitiveness of an English gentlewoman, she was a creature to love and protect, a thing of beauty and sweetness.

While the cousins were making their toilet for dinner, on the day of Asa Dillingham's advent, the impostor, Wetherby, sent word that he wished to see them in the library a few minutes before the time of assembling.

Paola, as yet, knew nothing of Dillingham's presence, so that she was all curiosity at this unusual summons. Inez simulated a corresponding interest.

"My dears," said the impostor, when they appeared before him, "while in the city to-day, I ran across an old boyhood friend—a man 'oo knew your mother, Paola—and by my invitation he becomes our guest for a few weeks. 'E is a man of no pretensions; but 'e 'as amassed a fortune in trade in the hold country. Hindeed, 'e 'ad hextensive business relations with your father, my dear. 'E 'as long been afflicted with a disease which 'as at length hinduced 'im to travel for 'is 'ealth. 'Is appearance at first may strike you as somewhat singular; but I 'ope 'is stay with hus may be made pleasant by bevery attention; for 'e is a most hestimable man, and where 'e is known is much sought after in the best circles."

The ladies both expressed their willingness to do everything in their power to entertain their relative's guest.

Almost on the moment Asa Dillingham made his appearance.

"My dears," said Wetherby, "this is my

most hesteemed friend, Mr. Asa Dillingham, of 'oom I have just been speaking."

"My dear Asa—Donna Inez Mentoza."

With a smile which had one significance to Paola, and a totally different one to Inez, Dillingham advanced, and extended his hand so markedly that it could not be ignored.

"I am highly honored by so distinguished an acquaintance," said he, with a double meaning.

Inez could hardly restrain a shudder, as she allowed her hand to come in momentary contact with the clammy palm of her malicious accomplice. She was so enraged at this enforced civility that she could not trust herself to speak. However, she controlled her features and courtied with marked deference.

"This," said Wetherby, "is my ward and niece, Donna Paola. You will recognize 'er mother in 'er."

Dillingham's look of deep interest as he approached his intended victim was not all simulated, nor was the expression of gloating admiration which made his face more repulsive than ever.

With a sort of paternal familiarity he took both hands of the shrinking girl, and clasped them close.

"My dear young lady," he said, with a simulation of tenderness which was simply sickening, "it is like renewing an old friendship to look at you—a friendship not without its painful memories," he added, with a sigh which was an insult to the dead.

The color faded from the cheeks of the sensitive Paola, as she felt the cold, damp fingers close about her hands like the folds of a serpent; but it swept back again at this reference to her mother. She could not help resenting the intimation of this hideous ghoul that he had dared to love one so pure and beautiful as she knew her mother to have been.

However, she mastered her feelings, and the party passed in to dinner.

Donna Inez and Wetherby were delighted with this opening of the campaign; and even Dillingham experienced a sardonic sort of pleasure in the repulsion he excited.

"As a scarecrow," he reflected, "I shall prove a dazzling success. She would elope with the devil to escape me!"

Excusing herself a moment on the plea of having forgotten something, Inez washed her hands thoroughly with hot water and soap, adding a bath in rose-water. She was back almost instantly, and during the meal had the pleasure of observing her cousin eat only with her knife and fork. The girl could not endure to touch food with her hands while they retained that nauseous, viscous sensation, as if she had been handling a reptile.

Inez pressed the bread upon her, and afterward the fruit, which Paola declined with an appealing look.

"Aren't you feeling well, dear?" asked Inez, with a laugh, perfectly apparent to her cousin, behind her mask of simulated solicitude; and in an agony of embarrassment poor Paola was forced to admit that her appetite had failed.

During the evening there were several callers, all of whom, however, had to be entertained by Donna Inez, since Dillingham hung about Paola with a serene egotism which excluded every one else from her society.

She sung for him and played for him; and afterward he talked to her about her mother in a way which made her ears tingle in spite of her good-nature, until her guardian took pity on her and engaged his guest in a game of whist.

Though her friends were too well-bred to comment, their looks showed that Dillingham was not destined to become a prime favorite with them.

One of the gentlemen is worthy of note, as he will play a conspicuous part in our drama.

Leslie Mansfield was as elegant as was his name. He could dance "divinely"—such was the verdict of the "butterflies." He had white teeth and white hands, and white cheeks dashed with red. Indeed, his complexion was, secretly, the envy of all his lady friends.

Three times a week Leslie's barber went gravely through the operation of putting lather on his patron's dainty cheeks and chin, and scraping it off again; though this seemed to be a mere matter of form. The same barber parted Leslie's hair within an inch, *exactly*, of the middle. But one sacred mystery rested between Leslie and this on other themes loquacious knight of the razor—how had he promoted the reluctant growth of that microscopic mustache whose blonde beauty was at once Leslie's care and pride?

As if Nature had grudged him anything positive, his eyelashes had a bleached look, and his

blue eyes were a pale blue; his movements, while they were, oh, so graceful! lacked directness and vigor; his voice was musical instead of being strong, and slurred r's took the place of sharp, crisp articulation.

And this fashion-plate in water-colors prided himself on being a "ladies' man!" Well, we freely dedicate him to that creation of society. He certainly was not fit for God's last, best work, a thorough woman.

His fancy being struck by her delicate beauty, Leslie Mansfield imagined that he was desperately in love with Paola Careno. He felt surprised and piqued that a lady whom he distinguished from all her sex by honoring her with his preference should not at once lay her grateful heart at his feet.

Certainly Paola received his attentions with a provoking matter-of-course serenity. She liked him; for in many ways he conduced to her pleasure; but it would take a man that was a man to awaken her love!

Being denied her society, his only strongly developed characteristic, his utter selfishness, came to the surface; and he asked Inez what stupid old duffer that was monopolizing her cousin.

"What! the Honorable Asa Dillingham a duffer?" cried Inez, arching her eyebrows in affected dismay. "Why, sir, do you know that he is worth half a million sterling? And he made a hit last year in Parliament, in a speech on something or other. I tell you he is one of the lions at home! He was considered an eligible *parti* among the dowagers; and, having escaped their machinations, I shouldn't be surprised if he took some one from this side the water to grace the head of his table."

"Faugh!" ejaculated Leslie, with undisguised disgust, "could any woman marry him? He reminds me of a toad-stool!"

"Oh, you are too severe," dissented Inez. "And you know women don't look for personal beauty in the men they marry. Mr. Dillingham is a man of good intellectual parts, and of sterling integrity. What makes him the more interesting to Paola is the fact that he knew her mother."

"He's old enough to have known her great-grandmother!" growled Leslie, discontentedly.

Donna Inez tapped him playfully with her fan, and welcomed a new candidate for her attention.

But the seed she had sown was destined to bear fruit.

One of the articles of Leslie's creed was that no woman was proof against the seductions of money; and in imagination he saw this frightful old ghoul throwing his filthy lure into the balance against his rival's personal attractions and carrying off the prize. Bitterly Leslie reflected that he never had a hundred dollars which he could call his own for a week at a time.

When she was released from Dillingham, Paola felt bored to death; and as Leslie immediately claimed her he got the full benefit of the reaction. She felt grateful for the change, and without premeditation, or indeed consciousness of the fact, she became more gracious than usual to Leslie.

This elated the lover, and in conjunction with the late reminder that he must win her if he would have her, led him to surpass himself in complaisance. So Paola's evening had a very pleasant ending, and she ascended to her room just before midnight with the impression that Mr. Leslie Mansfield was a very agreeable gentleman.

"Well," said Inez, when they were alone together, "what do you think of him?"

"Of whom?" asked Paola, coming out of a reverie.

"The Hon. Asa Dillingham!" said Inez, with evident mock gravity.

"He seems to be a man of considerable information," began Paola.

"But a disagreeable person to shake hands with!" interrupted Inez, with a burst of ringing laughter. "Oh, dear, you must forgive me for teasing you at table; but it was better than the opera bouffe to see your head forcing a compromise between your heart and your stomach. But even politeness will never induce me to touch his hand again. Faugh! why don't such people, if they must mingle in society, have consideration for the feelings of others?"

"It is his misfortune," suggested the ever-kind Paola. "I am sure I would rather endure discomfort than to hurt him by betraying any signs of repulsion."

Donna Inez had been precipitate in startling the complacency of Leslie Mansfield. Her words bore fruit before her other plans were

matured. The event which threatened serious damage to the plots of the intriguers happened while Leslie had Paola out boating.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DESPERATE LOVER.

THE scene was a broad, smooth sheet of water, shut in by trees that hung lazily over the water's edge—a sort of bayou setting in from the Mississippi.

On its surface floated a pretty little skiff, with upholstered seats and a gay awning of alternate white and blue stripes, scalloped around the edges and bound with red.

In the stern-sheets Paola Careno trailed her taper fingers in the water, feeling the charm of being shut in from all the great outside world, with only a pleasant companion and nature.

Dipping the sculls, idly, Leslie Mansfield sat amidships, with an abstracted, nervous air.

Finding him unusually taciturn, Paola asked: "What is the matter, Mr. Mansfield? Are you not enjoying yourself?"

"Yes—yes—very much indeed."

"But you haven't been answering me as if you were."

"Excuse me. The scenery is very beautiful."

"There! See how stupid you are! It is nearly five minutes since I was speaking about the scenery."

"The fact is, I have something on my mind."

"Indeed? Business no doubt. How complimentary to my powers of entertainment!"

"No, not business."

"Pleasure, then, that wins your thoughts from the present! Keep on; you are improving matters!"

And she looked at him with a coquettish pout.

"It may be great pleasure, or very great pain," he replied, seeking to gain time, now that the crisis was at hand.

The half-smile on her face gave place to a look of questioning solicitude.

If she had flushed in the slightest degree, he could have fallen at her feet in the most approved style, and recited the speech he had been conniving over; but she was so perfectly unconscious that he was struck with sudden consternation, and the words of his declaration flew to the four winds.

Leslie Mansfield was not a clever man; but society has a certain set of cut and dried formulæ which help even a stupid man who is versed in them through the ordinary difficulties of life; so our lover had never experienced such embarrassment as he now found himself in.

But he had gone too far to recede, and flushing crimson to the tips of his ears, he stammered:

"Paola—I beg your pardon! Miss Careno!—I've known you for six months, now; and of all the ladies of my acquaintance you—I don't know—that is to say—I mean—Why, hang it all!—I beg your pardon! Of course that isn't a proper expression to use before a lady. But I want to tell you that I never was sweet on—"

And here poor Leslie came to a dead standstill, a total wreck. The slang which was most familiar sprung unbidden to his lips in his painful confusion; and it was so inapt that it took his breath away.

By this time Paola was as pretty a picture of embarrassment as one need wish to look at.

"Mr. Mansfield, I think I understand you," she began, from pure kindness of heart, wishing to help him through his painful floundering. Then perceiving that she had made a very awkward confession, seeing that the man had not as yet really declared himself, she was at a loss how to proceed.

Gathering courage of desperation, Leslie made a reckless plunge, and did what he ought to have done at the start. Dropping his oars, he stepped over the intervening thwart, cast himself at the lady's feet, and sought to seize her hands.

But the rocking of the skiff frightened Paola, and caused her to grasp the sides of the boat with a cry of dismay, thus taking her hands out of the reach of her lover.

The situation would have been ludicrous to a spectator; but it only added to Leslie's embarrassment.

"Oh, Mr. Mansfield! pray get up!" cried the girl, in her fright, before he could find his tongue.

"Paola, won't you let me tell you?" he pleaded.

"But we shall certainly be upset!" cried Paola, pale to the lips, and clinging to the gunwales as if she dreaded instant immersion.

"No. See; it is all right now," urged Leslie, getting off his knees, so that he rested on his

toes in a squatting posture, and in turn taking hold of the sides of the boat to steady it.

It was a most ungraceful attitude in which to make a declaration of love; but proposing to a lady who is in sympathy with your feelings, or at worst gives you her undivided attention, is quite a different thing from breathing the old, old story into the ear of a beauty whom your very approach has just scared half to death.

And now, with that aptness of her sex to seize upon the first avenue of escape, from an awkward situation, Paola, even after the danger, if there had been any, was past, continued the picture of nervous apprehension, as she cried, piteously:

"Oh, take me ashore, please!—take me ashore!"

Most men are annoyed by what seems to them unreasonable timidity on the part of a woman. To be the cause of that fear just at the moment when he sought to inspire her with a life-long confidence is enough to try the patience of an ordinary mortal. But to feel that she is hedging behind that trepidation to escape his declaration, and not swear, ought to entitle any man to canonization!

Leslie did not swear—*audibly*; but he set back on the thwart, and his determination to state his case and get an answer appeared in his face.

"Listen to me, Paola," he said, firmly and collectedly. "I want to tell you that I love you, and ask you to be my wife."

When a man is "mad" he usually acquires the eloquence of terse, definite statement. Leslie spoke to the point; but the tone of his voice and the flash in his eyes were strangely at variance with the tender avowal conveyed by his words.

Paola accepted the defeat of her little ruse; very decorously she replied:

"Mr. Mansfield, I am very sorry to pain you; but I cannot accede to your wishes."

All the anger faded from Leslie's face, to give place to white-lipped panic. Grasping the maiden's hands, he cried:

"Paola! Paola! you do not mean it!—oh, you cannot mean it!"

"I do mean it, Mr. Mansfield," replied the girl, gently yet firmly. "I like you as a friend, but nothing more. I am sorry if I have ever led you to think otherwise."

"Give me time, Paola. Don't decide yet, dear. Oh, I love you so! You can't help but return my affection when you see how devoted I shall be. Your every wish—"

But the girl shook her head.

"It is useless, Mr. Mansfield. I can never learn to love you."

"You love some one else?" cried Leslie, with a jealous pang.

"No," replied Paola, looking straight into his eyes, without a trace of embarrassment. "I have never loved any man."

"Then my chance is as good as any one's else," urged Leslie, with an egotism not uncommon among men of his caliber.

"Excuse me; but you are not the style of a man I have pictured as my future husband."

"But no one ever marries their ideal."

"I think that no one who looks for happiness should depart very far from it."

"No doubt I am very far below your standard!"

There was a touch of returning asperity in his voice.

With great forbearance, yet with a slight chill of dignity, Paola replied:

"I did not say so."

Nothing is so hopeless as arguing against feeling.

Leslie gave up in despair.

"You will not be persuaded?" he asked.

"I cannot."

"Your decision is irrevocable?"

"It is."

"Then, by Heaven! I will show you what it is to love! You have a heart of ice; but I will touch it. Paola Careno, no man will ever love you as I love. You might have secured a life of devotion; but you have spurned it. When you think of me, remember that I threw away only what you have pronounced worthless. Farewell, Paola! Without you, life is insupportable!"

He rose; and, divining his purpose, Paola caught the skirt of his coat.

"Oh, Mr. Mansfield!" she cried, breathlessly.

"Do you relent?" he demanded, pausing, yet clutching the coat in readiness to snatch it out of her hand and consummate his purpose.

"Oh, you would not dare to do so foolish—so wicked a thing!" cried Paola, ignoring his question.

"Do you relent?" he repeated.

"I cannot. But—"

"Then see whether I dare or not!"

Leslie Mansfield was not a courageous man; but weak, selfish, and above all vain men are just the ones who do desperate deeds in a moment of recklessness. He was thoroughly exasperated by the petty annoyances he had met with in his infelicitous love-making; his vanity was hurt by that greatest slight that can be sustained by a conceited man, the rejection of his love; and, lastly, for the moment, his selfishness, with characteristic proneness to enhance the value of a thing desired in proportion as it is unattainable, made life deprived of what he coveted seem hateful. Such men commit suicide as a petulant child casts itself on the ground, regardless of the hurts it will receive.

These feelings, together with the love of weak natures to create a sensation by striking terror to their fellows, were sufficient to goad Leslie Mansfield to self-destruction.

Determinedly he sought to tear himself free from the detaining hands, stepping forward over the thwart from which he had just arisen.

Screaming, "Mr. Mansfield!" Paola clung to him so that she was dragged to her feet.

The boat swayed.

In terror the girl let go her hold.

Being suddenly freed and at the same time attempting to throw himself from the boat, Leslie stumbled and fell with one knee on the gunwale.

In a twinkling the frail craft was capsized; and Paola's piercing scream ended in an ominous gurgle, as she sunk beneath the water.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THAT MAN MUST DIE."

EIGHT years of hope deferred had changed Don Manuel Rubio from a somewhat reckless devil-may-care gallant into a rather bitter man of the world. His campaigns in the Cuban revolutions had given him an imperious, soldierly-bearing; and his face had contracted a look of fierce discontent, a perpetual protest against his hard lot.

One may fight one's way to a throne; but how carry a woman's favor by storm?

Sore with long disappointment, he formed a desperate resolve to settle his fate, one way or the other, for good and all; and so sought his obdurate lady-love.

"Inez," he began, having her out behind a span of mettlesome grays on the famous Shell Road, "it is now eight years since you charged me with a commission, on the execution of which you promised to be my wife."

"Yes," admitted the woman, showing no emotion at this reference to a murder at her instigation.

"During that time nothing has occurred to countervail the evidence that the mission was fully executed?"

"No."

"Inez, during this probation have I been reasonably patient—as patient as you could expect a man to be whose life-happiness was being withheld from him for what seems to him insufficient reasons? Have I been as little impatient as you could wish a lover to be?"

"You have been a model of tractability, all things considered, Don Manuel," said the woman, looking into his eyes with a smile meant to win him from his seriousness.

But he was in no mood for levity. Indeed he was holding strong passions in check, and they threatened to burst from his control, as he asked:

"Inez, do you ever mean to redeem that pledge?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not to-day."

"Don't trifle with me!"

"Don't threaten me!"

"You are quick to resent the slightest assertion of manhood on my part, in opposition to your will," said the man, bitterly.

"Because," said the woman, looking straight before her, "I have lived in this world long enough to know that in the domestic relation there is no compromise between ruling and being ruled. It suits my nature to rule!"

"But I have a right to at least ordinary consideration!" cried the man, passionately.

Inez turned her eyes upon his flushed face, and said, in measured, icy tones:

"The man who marries me has a right to just so much as he can command—not a feather's-weight more! He is at liberty to oppose his will to mine whenever he chooses. I am willing to abide the issue, and he must accept it!"

"And this is the love for which I have damned

my soul, and then served in bondage for eight years!"

"If you are not content, I will pay you in money, double what you have been paid for risking your life on the field!"

Don Manuel gazed at this woman of the marble heart helplessly. He was thinking of the time when she hung languishing in his arms. Contrasting the past with the present, he almost wondered whether it could be the same woman.

"Inez," he asked, "do you love me? Have you ever loved me?"

"Yes," she replied, "I love you—I have always loved you."

"I could well believe you once," he replied, with an appeal in his eyes. "But now you are so changed. You answer me with less enthusiasm than if you were accepting an invitation to a drive."

"It is because I have outlived sentiment, Manuel, and got at the actualities of life," said the woman, more graciously than she had spoken before.

"It was a sorry day for me when you ate of this tree of knowledge," replied Don Manuel, ruefully. "I would rather have you as you were—"

"Before the fall?" laughed the woman, somewhat sardonically, following out his figure.

"Before your head strangled your heart!"

"But now you must take me as I am, or not at all."

"I will gladly do that."

"Then you must wait patiently—"

"*Por dios!* have I not waited?"

"You may be nearer the end than you think," said the woman, looking into vacancy.

"Inez!"

"It may be—it must be within the next twelve months, if at all."

"Inez!"

"I have had two motives in deferring our union."

"Two motives?"

"One, the fear that that man might some day arise in our path."

"But the circumstances made escape impossible. And he has not been heard from for eight years."

"True."

"Then you must now forego that objection."

"I do."

"Then what remains?"

"The great prerequisite of civilized life—gold!"

"Inez!"—reproachfully.

"You are not rich—I am not rich. But those tastes for the gratification of which money is indispensable have come to dominate my life. Starve them and the most perfect love would turn to hate."

"There is one year of my life which has ever since been a perfect marvel to me," pursued Donna Inez, dreamily, referring to her year of married life in the seclusion of Harry Hazeltine's villa. "It was a year whose content was partly simulated and partly real, though how I could have vegetated amid such surroundings now passes my comprehension. I was not happy—"

"Bah! let us not dwell on the past!" she cried, interrupting herself with fierce scorn.

"What, then, of the future?"

"My cousin is within one year of her majority."

"Yes."

"Within that year a large share of her property must come under my control."

"But your plot has hung fire for eight years."

"A part of the delay was unavoidable; a part was due to Wetherby's procrastination. While his stomach is full he is content. But he must act now."

"And if you succeed you will deny me no longer?"

"Manuel, I will deny myself no longer!" said the woman, looking into his eyes with the first show of tenderness.

"*Ay dios!*" trembled on the lips of the Spaniard.

But at that instant his companion turned her eyes away from him, and with a low ejaculation spread her fan before her face.

Don Manuel saw the blood recede from her cheeks, while her features became rigid with fear; and looking up he discovered a carriage containing a lady and gentleman just passing, the gentleman staring at Donna Inez with a look of surprised recognition and drawing in his horse.

The gentleman was Capt. Ned Taunton; and in his amazement he actually brought his horse to a standstill, with the half-formed purpose to turn about, follow the carriage he had just

passed, and ascertain if this was indeed the woman he had left for dead eight years ago in Cuba, stricken down by the hand of his best friend, and that friend made a wanderer over the face of the earth in consequence. But second thought showed him the great improbability of his supposition. Then, too, if it proved to be she, no good would result from the establishment of the fact, since, as then supposed, Harry Hazeltine had been dead eight years, lost overboard from that Spanish vessel in a storm—so the captain of the *Ysabel* had reported.

These thoughts passed through Taunton's mind all in a flash; and when his lady companion looked at him in surprise, and asked:

"What is the matter?"

He replied:

"Nothing."

And drove on.

He would not have regained his equanimity so easily had he known what transpired in the other carriage.

Donna Inez clutched Don Manuel's arm.

"Did you notice that man?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Yes. He started as if he recognized you with a great deal of astonishment."

"He did recognize me!"

"Who is he?"

"For God's sake do not look back!" she cried, checking that very natural movement on Don Manuel's part. "I would not confirm his recognition for the world! He may conclude that he is mistaken. Has eight years changed me much?"

"Not much—no. But why do you fear him? That was not—Nonsense! You are crazy!"

"No, it is not the one you have in mind. I could not be mistaken in him. But it is a man whom I have almost as much cause to fear."

"Who, pray?" Have I met him?"

The woman laughed hysterically.

"No," she said, "I believe you did not stay to meet him."

It was the first time she had ever referred with anything like reproach to Don Manuel's flight when her body had intervened between him and her husband's bullet.

He did not see the force of her words, but looked at her puzzled, until she added:

"He was *his* nearest friend. His name is Taunton."

Then Don Manuel flushed crimson.

"Would you have had me stay, unarmed as I was?" he asked.

"No. You adopted the only prudent course."

"Prudent!" cried the man, his sore pride catching at the word that might have a double meaning. "I have explained to you again and again why I was unarmed—for your sake!"

"Yes—yes."

"And there could have been no possible advantage to you had I stood there and allowed myself to be butchered, without the ability to raise a finger in my own defense, or in yours—"

"I admit it all."

"Besides I did not even suspect that you were wounded until I saw him fleeing. Then I returned to you."

"That is true."

"And did I not follow him? Did I shrink when it came to the test of hurling him into the sea?"

"I have not questioned your courage."

"By implication only!"

"I did not mean to do so. I retract it."

"*Caramba!*" cried the Spaniard, not yet appeased; "in fair combat I dare face any man alive!"

"Thanks for the suggestion!" cried the woman, with sudden animation. "I shall put you to the test!"

"I hail the opportunity!" cried Don Manuel, with a touch of braggadocio. "I will vindicate myself in your eyes."

"Pardon me!—I did not mean it as a test. But my safety demands a service which will involve a duel, or the employment of a bravo. I believe there are such men to be bought in New Orleans, as in old Spain?"

"Since the question has come up I prefer that my own hand shall rid you of your enemy!"

"As you will. But that man must die!"

"Trust me—the world is no longer big enough to hold him and me!"

"But you must take care of yourself, Manuel!"

"*Enamorata*, do you care?" asked the man, in tender accents.

"More, perhaps, than you know!"

And there was a look in Donna Inez's eyes which showed that the old love was not dead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ODDS AND ENDS.

THAT night Capt. Taunton was thunderstruck at meeting his old friend, Harry Hazeltine, alive and in the flesh! His delight at this (to him) return from the grave was almost equaled by his pain at the great change which made the Harry of old scarcely recognizable in this man who seemed almost a wreck both physically and spiritually.

And yet there was something puzzling about Harry. Aside from that haggard ghastliness of face and strange blending of brilliancy and languor in his eyes, he seemed in full bodily vigor.

Taunton refrained from speaking of his encounter on the shell road until he should have proved that it was indeed Inez, more especially as he inferred from Harry's manner and some bitter words that he let drop that he was still under the impression that his wife was dead.

For three or four days following Capt. Taunton was so busy with duties pertaining to his ship that he found it impossible to investigate the matter, and for the same reason Don Manuel Rubio was unable to find him so as to force an encounter.

Donna Inez fretted at the delay, until in a moment of ungovernable irritation she told Don Manuel not to approach her again until he brought an account of the duel.

This banishment prevented her from communicating to him at once her more terrible encounter with her husband, which took place on the afternoon of that day.

In the evening Harry Hazeltine went to drink the false James Wetherby under the table, and in the morning went horseback riding, partly to annul the effects of his night of debauch, and partly to divert his mind from its wretchedness.

This brings us to the end of our retrospect. The reader will recall that on his return Harry was startled by a cry, and discovered a lady and gentleman struggling in the water near a capsized boat.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RESCUE.

WHETHER Mr. Leslie Mansfield would have persisted in his designs on his own life had he met with no opposition, is an open question. Perhaps it was the unforeseen accident of the overturning of the boat that turned his thoughts into an entirely different channel; or possibly Paola's scream unnerved him; or the touch of water may have dampened his ardor.

One fact, however, was demonstrated. No sooner did he find himself in danger of drowning than the desire to preserve his life became as all-engrossing as it had been a moment before to throw it away.

Let not the reader suppose that he was actuated on the principle of "every man for himself, and the gentleman in black take the hindmost!"

Perhaps the fact that he could not swim may be taken in extenuation of this, to say the least, ungallant proceeding. Indeed, he had little advantage over Paola; and both might eventually have drowned, but for help which came from the shore.

Paola's despairing cry had reached the ears of Harry Hazeltine; and wheeling his horse sharply, he spurred him into the water, crying out to Vikir:

"Follow me!"

Master and man swam their horses to the rescue, and while Harry drew the drowning Paola to his saddle-bow, Vikir disentangled Leslie Mansfield from the awning of his boat, where he was making desperate though not altogether successful efforts to keep his head above water.

A great surge of conflicting emotions swept through Harry Hazeltine's heart, as he recognized the girl who lay limp and lifeless in his arms. Fate seemed determined to bring them together. Should he yield to it?

The very sight of her had roused his better nature, and set it to rattling the chains of distrust of womanhood which for years had overwhelmed it. It had never rested quietly. Its perpetual protest had made the unrest of his life. But during the past twenty-four hours it had fought in open rebellion.

In spite of himself he believed in the purity and truth of this woman. And from faith in her to love for her was but a step.

Her helplessness now appealed to him more strongly than her beauty had done. As the sense of protection is one of the strongest elements of mother-love, so a magnanimous nature goes out in tenderness toward anything that needs its cherishing strength.

While his horse swam back to the shore Harry gazed upon the unconscious girl, until tears came into his eyes. They were the first that had shed their balm on his sore heart since that day eight years ago, when, all in a moment, his spirit had been crushed to the earth.

But by the time he had dismounted and laid her on the greensward, the fierce fires of a bitter resentment had burned his eyes dry.

He hugged his wrong to his heart. He would not forget that she was one of a fickle sex whose weak impulsiveness rendered them incapable of a strong, abiding love, to which a man might anchor all his hopes, confident that all the powers of earth could not prevail against it. It was such a love that he craved. And trusting to a delusion of fair seeming, his heart had been shipwrecked!

Embittered by these reflections, he hated the unconscious girl for her power over him. At the same time he hated himself for a coward, as he resolved to fly from the fascinations of her pure face.

He had no fears for her safety. Her unconsciousness had not been induced by suffocation from her immersion in the water. She had fainted with terror. She would revive in a few minutes. By that time he must be away.

To use a popular expression, Leslie Mansfield looked like a drowned rat. Aside from the scare and the wetting of his clothes he was none the worse for his abortive attempt at suicide.

"Allow me to thank you for your timely assistance," he said to Harry, "and let us proceed at once to the restoration of—"

"One moment," interposed Harry, checking him as he knelt beside the unconscious Paola.

"The lady is in no danger. She will revive of her own accord in a moment. She has only fainted."

"Meanwhile, I have a word to say which may strike you as strange. Set it down to the score of eccentricity, if you wish. It is this:

"I know absolutely nothing about this lady, and she knows nothing of me. For reasons of my own, I wish this ignorance of each other to continue. Moreover, I do not wish to figure in the role of a hero, nor as the recipient of any one's gratitude. Explain to her the rescue in any way you choose, only do not betray my agency in it. She will never hear any story contradictory of the one she hears from your lips."

"See! she already shows signs of returning animation."

"If you feel any gratitude for the preservation of your own life, do not betray me! Good-by!"

And leaping again into the saddle, Harry dashed out of sight, followed by Vikir.

Leslie Mansfield's amazement won his attention even from Paola for a moment, while he gazed after the man whose strange demeanor seemed explainable only on the theory that he was of unsound mind. But if he was a lunatic, he had an equally strange keeper. During the whole proceeding Vikir had remained as mute as an automaton.

But Paola sighed and shivered. Leslie knelt again and took her hands.

Before Paola opened her eyes Leslie had time to reflect that, if he maintained a discreet silence on the manner of her getting ashore, she would of course infer that he had saved her. If the matter ever came to light, which was improbable, he could justify himself on the ground of his debts of gratitude to their common rescuer, and the latter's earnest injunction of silence. As a question of morality, this deception gave him very little trouble.

"Oh, Paola! can you ever forgive me?" he cried, on her first awakening to consciousness. "I cannot tell you what I have suffered, fearing that you would never open your eyes again! The deadly peril it has exposed you to has shown me my folly and wickedness. Can you forgive me? I shall never forgive myself!"

"Yes, I forgive you freely. Indeed there seems to be but little real harm done," said Paola, smiling faintly.

In her never failing kindness of heart her first instinct was to relieve what she supposed her companion's remorse and self-reproach, by putting the best face on the matter.

"Oh! you can't tell how you relieve me by your cheerfulness; though I know you are far from well; and it doesn't make me any the less blameworthy. Can you remain here alone while I go for some sort of conveyance to get you home?"

"Perhaps I can walk to the nearest house," suggested Paola, though it made her dizzy to sit up.

"Oh, don't try to do that! It is altogether

unnecessary," protested Leslie, reflecting that the horsemen might not yet be out of sight on the level road.

But he might have spared himself anxiety. Paola was not equal to any pedestrian effort.

Leaving her in as comfortable a position as possible, he secured a carriage and shawls, and so took her home.

But on the way he said:

"I am ashamed to ask any consideration at your hands, after what has occurred. But you are so generous. Will you screen my folly, and let this go to our friends as an accident?"

You may readily believe that Paola was only too anxious to agree to this adjustment of what otherwise would have been a very embarrassing adventure to relate.

So the world coupled Leslie Mansfield and Paola Careno as the hero and heroine of a spicy adventure; and humorous friends predicted "cards and cake" as the natural outgrowth.

But the keen and interested eyes of Donna Inez detected a certain restraint in the manner of both Paola and Leslie. Moreover Paola now manifested a gentleness in her intercourse with Leslie which inspired him with gloom instead of pleasure.

Under Inez's manipulation Leslie was the most plastic of wax; and once on the track, she soon had the whole story, so far as it related to his proposal and rejection. On the particulars of the rescue he was the embodiment of reticence.

"You foolish boy!" chided Inez. "You have come near spoiling everything."

"No doubt," said Leslie, ruefully, "if everything was not spoiled before I attempted it!"

"Nonsense! You don't understand women. Do you want to marry my cousin?"

"Rather," answered the lover, dryly.

"Then you shall."

"Nothing easier!"

"Skeptic! leave matters to me."

"I know of nothing more promising."

"You speak more wisely than you know. Would you marry Paola knowing that she did not love you?"

"I would be only too glad to get her on any terms."

"What would you do to get her?"

"Anything under heaven!"

"Would you give all that you possess in the world?"

"Ha! ha! That wouldn't buy her a wedding-dress!"

"Your life?"

"I meant to give that."

"Would you strain a point of honor?"

"Pish!"

And Leslie snapped his fingers, adding:

"Try me."

"Not that that is necessary, of course," said Inez; "but I am glad to see you in earnest. I can't tolerate a milk-and-water man! Now, Leslie Mansfield, I have taken a great fancy to you, and have set my heart on seeing you and dear Paola marry. You two were made for each other; and if you've got the pluck to fight your own way, you will marry her in the end. I'll help you; and when I undertake a thing, I always succeed!"

There was something in her manner that impressed Leslie; and after gazing at her in silence a moment, he said:

"If we do succeed, ask anything of me in return—anything!"

"It's a bargain!" she replied.

And they clasped hands on it.

Meanwhile Harry Hazeltine had returned to his hotel in greater perturbation than ever.

Once more he passed into the room which no one but he and Vikir ever entered. The same look of deep sadness settled down over the face of the West Indian, and he gazed at the curtain reproachfully.

Mutely he took up his vigil again, and the silence of death reigned in the apartment.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUEL.

In the early evening of the day which so nearly witnessed the death of Paola Careno, Capt. Ned Taunton was walking rapidly toward the Hotel St. Louis, in quest of his friend, Harry Hazeltine, when he brushed against a man going in the opposite direction.

Turning, he saw a man of military bearing, evidently a Spaniard; and, with his wonted politeness, gallant Capt. Taunton executed a naval salute, and said: "Pardon, señor!" and would

have passed on, not recognizing the man, had he not cried, cavalierly:

"Hold, *Señor Americano*! If I mistake not, this is the second rudeness you have been guilty of. Boor, take this, and learn better manners!"

And Don Manuel Rubio, for it was none other, struck Capt. Taunton on the cheek with his glove.

On the impulse of the moment Ned shot a return blow straight from the shoulder; and the insolent Spaniard rolled on the pavement.

"A Roland for your Oliver, sir Spaniard!" cried the Yankee sailor. "You see, we never leave a courtesy unrequited."

"*Caramba!* it is characteristic!" growled Don Manuel, as he picked himself up. "This dog has the recourse of a *lepero*!" (beggar.)

"Not so!" cried Taunton, promptly. "If you are not satisfied, I can let some of the hot blood out of your veins. It may give you a milder temper."

"*Chingara!*" sneered the Spaniard, in choice Castilian billingsgate, "the slash of the cutlass is not fit for the dueling ground."

"You are over-nice, my fine fellow!" laughed Taunton. "For my part, I am satisfied with your rank, since, no doubt, you will bleed very much like a better man. But, to satisfy your scruples, let me present myself as Captain Edward Taunton, in command of the United States cutter, *Fleetwing*."

And bowing, he presented his card.

"Unless, perhaps," he added, with an insulting smile, "you prefer to hire a bravo to avenge your wrongs!"

"*A servicio de V., señor capitán!*" said Don Rubio, presenting, in turn, his card.

"Señor Rubio," said Ned, glancing at the card, "it seems to me that undue importance is given these little affairs by formal negotiation. Can we not arrange this in a word between ourselves?"

"Your suggestion accords with my humor, precisely. The sooner over the better. If to-morrow morning, at sunrise, will suit you—"

"Unfortunately, the business of getting ready to put to sea occupies my time almost entirely, during the hours of daylight. But the moon will be at the zenith to-night at twelve. Will there be light enough for us to find each other with our sword-points—if that weapon is agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly! But I warn you that I shall fight to the death, which may interfere with your business of to-morrow!" said the Spaniard, with a covert sneer.

"I apprehend no such mischance," replied Ned, indifferently. "If all is satisfactorily arranged, then, we have three hours in which to seek a friend and repair to the ground."

"A friend, but no surgeon!" said Rubio, savagely.

"As you will. *Adios, señor!*"

"Good-evening, sir!" said Don Manuel, speaking in English, not to be outdone in politeness.

And bowing, the gentlemen parted.

Capt. Taunton hastened on to the Hotel St. Louis, to meet there with a strange surprise.

He was admitted to Harry's apartments by Vikir.

Brushing hastily by him he glanced about the room and asked eagerly:

"Isn't Mr. Hazeltine at home?"

"*Si, señor;* but—"

"Where is he?"

"My master craves your indulgence. He can receive no one."

"But he will receive me."

"Impossible, señor."

"Nonsense! I have known him all my life. We are like brothers. Where is he? I will speak to him."

"Pardon, señor. You must accept my word for it. He cannot see you."

"But I have important business. I must see him."

"To-morrow—"

"Will not do. I must see him to-night—immediately."

"Again, señor, it is impossible."

"Oh, but there must be some mistake! Did he give you special instructions that he would not receive me?"

"No, señor."

"Then I will go to him at once."

"*Señor!*"

But Taunton had opened the door to Harry's sleeping apartment, and entered before he could be prevented.

Vikir glided past him and got between him and the curtained door to Harry's private and mysterious retreat.

"Why, he is not here," said Taunton, glancing about the room. "Ah! here is another door."

He would have drawn aside the curtain; but Vikir stepped before it, and raising his hand with an impressive gesture, said:

"Stop, señor! You cannot enter!"

For the first time Taunton was sufficiently aroused from the contemplation of his own concerns to observe the grave, sad dignity of the West Indian.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" he asked.

"Señor, you cannot enter," repeated Vikir, with his eyes on the floor.

"You infernal croaker!" cried Taunton, losing all patience, "what is the meaning of this mummery? What is the reason I cannot enter?"

"Pardon, señor, but I cannot explain."

"But I will not be balked by your stupidity. There is no reason why your master should refuse to see me. Stand aside! I must see him."

And Taunton advanced, as if to thrust Vikir from the doorway.

His eyes blazing with sudden excitement, the West Indian drew a curiously-shaped dagger, and for the first time raising his voice from the sad cadences of sorrow to tones of ringing command, cried:

"Stay, señor! If you force me to it, I will serve my master even to the taking of the life of his best friend!"

In this attitude Vikir was a man whom no one could despise.

Brave man as he was, Captain Taunton stepped back before the blazing eyes of one whom he recognized as his equal at least in courage and determination.

Instantly Vikir's dagger disappeared; and his air of deprecating respect came back.

"Pardon, señor," he said. "I know my master's will, and must execute it."

Without arguing the point further, Ned raised his voice, and called:

"Hal!—I say, Hal! Come out here, old fellow. I wish to see you on a matter of life and death!"

No sound responded.

"You may call. He will not heed," said Vikir, more and more sadly.

Now a sudden fear seized Taunton, and he called again:

"Hal! Hal! Don't you hear me?"

Dead silence!

"I beg that you will desist," said Vikir, "lest you arouse impertinent curiosity in the hotel."

"Has anything happened to your master?" asked Ned, gazing anxiously into Vikir's gloomy face.

"Nothing, señor."

"Oh! he is not—"

But the question was left unfinished. Taunton conceived the idea that his friend might be intoxicated. Perhaps he was sleeping off the effects of his last night's debauch. This theory would explain Vikir's sadness. The servant loved his master, and was pained and humiliated by his weakness.

Going to Harry's writing-table, Ned dashed off a note, relating his encounter with Don Manuel Rubio, stating his regret at having to seek any other than his best friend at such a time, and adding that, if he survived the meeting, he would send word, to relieve Harry's anxiety.

"Give this to your master as soon as he makes his appearance," said Taunton, adding with a brave man's respect for the feelings of the most humble: "Pardon my harsh—"

"Señor, say not a word!" interrupted Vikir; and taking Capt. Taunton's hand, he touched his lips to it with a humility which was not inconsistent with the most perfect self-respect.

Beginning to see that Vikir was no ordinary servant, Taunton departed to prepare for the impending duel.

When he was gone Vikir began to pace the inner apartment. Pausing after a time, he stood with folded arms gazing with humid eyes at the curtain.

"Alas!" he sighed, "he is his own worst enemy!"

Meanwhile the duelists had repaired to the "Field of Honor!"

It was an open glade on the outskirts of the city, now bathed in a flood of silvery moonlight.

Capt. Taunton was accompanied by his own subordinate officer, Lieut. Roselle.

Don Manuel Rubio's second was an *attaché* of the Spanish consulate, Señor Camarez.

Relieved of hats, coats, vests and collars the principals were ready for action.

At the word their long, lithe blades came together with a sharp click.

Then eye to eye, and toe to toe, two men,

like human tigers, watched each for the other's life.

Restlessly they moved about each other—advancing—retreating—now standing firm.

The steel blades rubbed against each other with a sound like the hissing of serpents.

Now they were pressed round and round. Anon they flew apart, to strike together with a ringing clash.

Now tierce and carte! Now lunge and parry! Now *clash! clash! clash!* The flexible blades writhe and dart and whirl like living things.

At last a cry from Don Manuel's second, and the red blood!

Capt. Taunton's rapier had passed through his adversary's sword-arm!

Stepping back, Ned lowered the point of his weapon. He was willing to give the Don an opportunity to have his wound dressed.

But, enraged, the Spaniard cried:

"Fool! defend yourself! Did I not say I fought to the death?"

And he charged his adversary savagely.

Before this unexpected attack Ned was forced to retreat, defending himself at great disadvantage.

Stepping upon insecure ground, he tripped.

His adversary pressed him hard.

He sunk upon one knee, catching part of his weight on his left hand.

His guard, rendered insecure by his loss of equilibrium, was beaten up; and with a deadly thrust Don Manuel's rapier passed through his body!

The murderous Spaniard forced his weapon home to the hilt, and then let go the handle, that in falling Capt. Taunton might enlarge the wound by the weight of his own body.

But Ned fell over on his side.

Seeing this, Rubio was about to retake his sword, when Lieut. Roselle, who had divined the Spaniard's murderous intent, sprung forward, crying:

"Stop! Your work is done. I will withdraw that weapon."

Bowing stiffly, Don Manuel withdrew, donned his garments, and entering his carriage with his second, was driven rapidly from the field.

Entering Donna Inez's presence, he said:

"I have earned the right to present myself before you by adding another life to the account!"

"Edward Taunton is dead?"

"I have run him through the body within the hour! I see suspense has chased the color from your cheeks. He was not worth so much."

"It is not that," said Inez, who was indeed ghastly pale. "But if your work this time is not more thoroughly done than formerly, Taunton may yet live to be a grandfather."

"What do you mean?"

"Day before yesterday I stood face to face with the man you told me was dead—Harry Hazeltine—my husband!"

CHAPTER XXI.

DONNA PAOLA'S RECEPTION.

It was morning before Harry Hazeltine appeared from his secret retreat.

His face was more than usually haggard, his complexion ghastlier, his eyes more intensely brilliant, yet if possible more broodingly sad.

As he presented the note Ned Taunton had left, Vikir let his eyes fall to the floor to hide their sorrowing reproachfulness.

"What! he has gone to fight a duel, and I not with him? At what time was he here, Vikir?"

"At nine, *excellenza*."

"He was to fight at twelve! And he has sent no other message?"

"None, *excellenza*."

"Oh, if he is dead! And all owing to my accursed folly! But no, it cannot be! Vikir, a carriage, instantly!"

"*Si, excellenza*."

And with an obeisance the West Indian withdrew.

Harry began to pace the room in an agony of remorse.

"When he needed me I lay— Oh, curse the folly! What does it profit me? And, now, what has it cost me! Never! never again will I sink myself beyond the reach of my friend's hand! But now it is too late!—too late! Oh, Ned! you never failed me!"

Thus he passed the time with self-upbraidings, until Vikir reappeared, and said:

"*Excellenza*, the carriage is in readiness."

"Vikir," said the master, turning to his servant as to a friend, and pointing toward the curtained apartment with a look of hatred, "that room has cost a dereliction that nothing can repair. Take the key, lock that accursed

door, and never under any circumstances—no matter what may happen, or what I may do—let me have it again!”

“My master! Can this be true?” cried Vikir, his face showing a struggle between delight and incredulity.

“It remains with you to stand by your trust. I have charged you.”

“*Excellenza*,” cried the West Indian, with tears streaming from his eyes, while he sunk upon one knee and covered his master’s hand with kisses. “I will guard it with my life! It shall be the test of my love! *Mil, mil gracias!* to-day the curse falls away!”

Overpowered, he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed.

“*Bueno!*” said Harry, softly, and laid his hand tenderly on Vikir’s head, himself not a little moved. “I am well beloved, of a verity!”

“Was not I, and my sister as well, saved by thee?” cried Vikir, raising his eyes with loving gratitude to his master’s face.

“Nay, good Vikir; attribute it not to me. Hadst thou not sought to avenge me, even to the sacrificing of thine own life, thou wouldst never have reached the island; nor would I have had any one to save me from the return of the sea, so that she might be rescued. But we must lose no more time. One that loved me even as thou dost may now be lying dead!”

“Forgive me that I have let my joy detain thee,” cried Vikir, arising. “I go to the execution of the most grateful duty thou hast imposed!”

And locking the door of the mysterious room he secured the key, clutching it with a frown of defiant hatred, almost as if it were a living thing.

They then descended and entered the carriage, to be driven rapidly to Capt. Taunton’s hotel.

Already excited groups of gentlemen were gathered before the hotel and in the parlor and office. Ladies, too, listened with pallid cheeks and frightened eyes.

Passing this ominous spectacle with a sinking heart, Harry rapidly ascended the stairs to his friend’s room.

In the upper corridor he met Lieutenant Roselle, whose pale, anxious face showed that there was at least cause for suspense.

Ned, then, was not yet dead!

“My dear Roselle, tell me!” was all that Harry could say, as he grasped the young officer’s hand.

“No one can tell certainly” was the reply.

“We try to hope.”

“And his wound?”

“Run through and through!”

Harry groaned.

“I must go to him at once.”

“Stay! The doctor has ordered that he see absolutely no one but the nurse. The sight of friends would excite him. He is conscious enough to recognize you, but cannot speak.”

“Oh! but he may die! And when he came for me I was not accessible!”

“You must wait. It is his only chance. A single thrill of emotion now might turn the scale against him.”

“Then, by Heaven! I will avenge him!” cried Harry, excitedly. “Who is this Don Manuel Rubio?”

“An ex-officer of the Cuban revolutionists, I understand, forced to fly the island by the triumph of the mother country.”

“And where is he to be found?”

“I think he is a guest of Mr. James Wetherby. But he may have left the city until this affair blows over.”

“I will ascertain. But the whole world is not large enough to hide him from my revenge!”

Forced to be content with the reports of the nurse and doctor, as they made their appearance from time to time, Harry remained at the hotel all day in a fever of anxiety.

It was ten o’clock at night when he returned to his hotel, not to sleep, but to change his clothes; for Ned’s fatal note had prevented him from making his toilet that morning.

He found awaiting him a note of invitation to a reception given that evening by Donna Paola Careno. Accompanying it was a note from James Wetherby, expressing his regard for the man who had laid him beneath his own table, and apologizing for the lateness of the invitation on the ground that it had taken him twenty-four hours to recover sufficiently to extend it.

“I will accept this invitation,” declared Harry; “and if I find this Don Rubio he shall account to me!”

Making an evening toilet, he again entered

his carriage, and was driven to James Wetherby’s residence, in a fashionable suburb.

It was near midnight when he entered the brilliantly-lighted parlors.

The arrival of guests was no longer expected. James Wetherby had retired to the card-room, where he was occupied by a game of whist. Paola, having made all her guests welcome, was giving her attention more particularly to a nearer circle of friends.

Leslie Mansfield was the hero of the occasion, and was receiving his stolen honors with affected modesty.

“Mr. Harry Hazeltine,” announced the servant.

“The new friend that uncle James has gone into heroics over,” said Paola, and excusing herself to her friends, addressed Leslie Mansfield:

“Your arm, please.”

Rapidly he escorted her across the apartment, and stood face to face with the last man on earth he expected, or wished, to meet.

His embarrassment was so overpowering that it must have been observed by Paola, had she not recognized with a thrill of pleasure the stranger to whom she already owed a courtesy.

Dropping Leslie’s arm, she advanced with outstretched hand.

“I make you welcome, Mr. Hazeltine,” she said, “on the part of my uncle, and myself as well. It is an unexpected pleasure, I assure you, to recognize one whom I have already met under less agreeable circumstances. We had begun to fear a disappointment, and Mr. Wetherby has gone to the card-room. Will you excuse him from coming to you, and accompany me there instead, as he is so unwell as to be confined to a chair?”

It was well for our hero that the lady had so much to say. Recognizing in his hostess the one of all women who could move him most powerfully, and whose good opinion in spite of himself he most coveted, and reflecting that she must know the circumstances of his acquaintance with her uncle, and despise him in consequence, Harry Hazeltine was rendered simply speechless.

Even as it was, he regained composure only in time to bend low over her hand and reply in fitting terms to her courteous welcome.

“Meanwhile, allow me to present Mr. Leslie Mansfield,” said Paola.

The gentlemen bowed with some restraint, Harry being the more self-possessed of the two.

Giving Leslie his *conge* with a bow and a smile, Paola took Harry’s arm and led him to the card-room.

James Wetherby was seated in an invalid chair which moved on rollers. His last excess had brought on an attack of the gout.

“Why, bless us and save us! if ’ere isn’t my friend ’Azeltine! My dear sir, I ’ad given you hup—with much regret, I assure you. You will hexcuse my rising? You see, going hunder the table, ’as halmost laid me on the shelf!—ha! ha! ha! Gentlemen, ’ere is a prince of good-fellows, Mr. ’Arry ’Azeltine. But, hexcuse me!—you ’aven’t met my ward before!—Donna Paola Careno.”

James Wetherby was perfectly serene in his want of tact; but Harry Hazeltine’s embarrassment was palpable when he acknowledged his introduction to Paola, blended as it was with the free and easy swing of the drinking bout.

But the girl had already made up her mind to like him. She did not understand her uncle’s allusions, as he had really told her nothing about Harry except that he was a gentleman whose acquaintance he wished to cultivate.

Wishing, then, to relieve his embarrassment, without inquiring into its cause, she said, gayly:

“Mr. Hazeltine, I will engage to find you better amusement than this stupid whist, if you will yield yourself to my direction. Uncle, and gentlemen, we leave you to the mysteries of king, queen and ace!”

There was a charm in her manner that was irresistible. Harry felt its influence. She soothed him. At the sound of her voice, at the touch of her hand, under the magic of her smile, all his antagonism melted away.

“I must introduce you to my cousin Inez,” said Paola.

Although Harry felt a thrill at the name, he had no suspicion of the precipice toward which his feet were tending.

CHAPTER XXII.

WOMAN’S POWER.

BUT the fullness of fate was not yet come.

At the announcement of Harry Hazeltine’s name, Inez had felt her heart leap and then stand still. She felt the iciness of death creeping over her. She could not speak. She could not move. Her eyes were fixed upon him

through the crowd. If he had come then, he would have found her sitting like one turned to stone.

But she saw him disappear in the direction of the card-room. The spell was broken. An icy shiver escaped her. She gazed around for help, like one awaking from a dream.

Don Manuel Rubio had had the good taste not to present himself at a *fête* so soon after his duel. He, therefore, was not at her side.

Asa Dillingham, however, chanced to be near.

He alone had seen the marked effect of Harry’s name on Donna Inez. Of their former relations he knew nothing. Out of revenge for Inez’s curiosity touching his life, James Wetherby had told Dillingham all that he knew of her—that she had been once married; but the name of her husband he had been unable to learn.

But Dillingham’s suspicious nature was quick to put this and that together.

Gliding to her side he whispered:

“Come! you look like a ghost. Your guests must not see you in this state. Moreover, *he* must not meet you. It will spoil everything.”

“Who must not meet me?” asked the woman, valiantly fighting on the defensive.

“Your husband!” said Dillingham, without hesitation. A pretty item it would make for the morning papers! Romance in high life!—and all that sort of thing.”

“Take me away!” said the woman, helplessly.

He put his arm within hers, the better to support her, and so got her out of the room without attracting attention, since she was seated near an open window.

On the veranda the cool air revived her a little.

“What excuse will you make for me?” she asked. “Something will be necessary. Paola will seek me at once.”

“I will say that you have over-exerted yourself in the dance. Fearing a headache, you have lain down for half an hour.”

“But what is the use of evading him?” cried Inez, in despair. “He has followed me here to denounce me!”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” said Dillingham. “He may know nothing of your relationship to Donna Paola. His presence here may be the merest accident. Maybe he would run from you as eagerly as you run from him.”

“But discovery is inevitable!”

“Perhaps. In any event he may be induced to keep his mouth shut.”

“Will you serve me?”

“Willingly, since I go up or down with you.”

“Go, then!”

“He went, in time to meet Paola coming up with Harry.”

“Mr. Dillingham,” she asked, “have you met—Ah! I see,” as the gentlemen bowed to each other. “But where is cousin Inez?” she continued. “I left her sitting here.”

“She felt oppressed by the heat of the room, and had overdone the ‘light fantastic,’ I believe,” said Dillingham. “She has gone to lie down for half an hour.”

“Inez has not felt well for two or three days,” said Paola, with concern. “Will you excuse me a moment, Mr. Hazeltine, while—”

“Don’t trouble yourself,” said Dillingham.

“I have just come from escorting her to her room. She expressed a wish that you would not attract attention to her withdrawal from the parlors by making it seem of consequence. She will be down again before she is missed.”

Only half-satisfied, Paola yielded.

Taking Harry among her friends, she presented him, and his distinguished appearance and polished manners won him immediate acceptance. Then she danced with him, and, for the only time that evening, *sung* at his request, and later promenaded the veranda on his arm.

Every moment brought him more and more under her fascinations, and for a time he yielded himself up to the subtle witchery.

Under the charm of his conversation, and the magnetic influence of his vicinity, the girl did not realize how much of her attention she was conferring on this stranger. But there was one who counted the minutes, and measured every smile with jealous vigilance.

Leslie Mansfield was in a painful predicament. A word from Harry could bring upon him the contempt not only of Paola, but of all his friends.

He managed to get our hero out of earshot of others, and said, with a cringing spirit of meanness:

“I did as you asked, feeling that, without asking your reasons, I owed you so much for saving my life, and another which is still more to me. But, by my silence, I have put myself in a false position. No one will consider the motive which actuated me, if the truth is now

brought to light. For God's sake, do not betray me! Remember, it was your own wish and—"

But Harry cut him short with a stare of icy contempt.

"You seem to forget the essentials of a gentleman!" he said.

"I beg your pardon!" said Leslie, with a crestfallen air. "Of course I should have known that the secret was safe."

With a cold bow, Harry turned on his heel and walked away.

"A life which is more to him than his own!" reflected our hero. "The coxcomb! But, pish! she is a woman! The lightness of his heels will make up for the emptiness of his head; and who cares for honor in 'such a love of a man!'"

With this bitter sneer Harry Hazeltine banished gentler sentiments from his mind and returned to his purpose of revenge. This woman had the power to make him forget even the wrongs of his dearest friend; and reflecting on his weakness, he hated her for it—or thought that he did.

Addressing a tailor's dummy to whom he had been presented, he asked:

"Do you know a certain Don Manuel Rubio?"

"Know him?" repeated Charles Augustus. "By Jove, I believe you! A deuce of a fellow! Met his man and ran him through before breakfast this morning! A good appetizer, by Jove! Ha! ha!"

"Is he present this evening? I was led to understand that he was a guest of Mr. Wetherby," said Harry, unmoved by the other's pleasantry.

"Oh, but ye know it wouldn't be good for 'm to appear in society on the same day after sending a fellah to the Kingdom of Heaven—or the other place!"

And this lesson in social etiquette was given with a patronizing air that was most exasperating.

"Thank you!" said Harry, so gravely that his irony was not perceived.

"Oh, not all! Rubio played the devil and all with the fair creatures before. After this he'll distance everything on the course."

"No doubt!"

And with set teeth Harry bowed, and passed on.

But while his fury was at its height she met him, and her smile calmed the tempest.

Without rudeness he could not avoid asking her to join in the dance that was just forming. She had courted the invitation, by that subtle contrivance by which a lady may compass her own wishes, and her smile showed her gratification as she accepted it.

After the dance they went out on the cool veranda; and he was once more completely under her spell.

"I am disappointed that you have failed to meet my cousin Inez," she said, after a time. "I have been to see if she could not come down; but she is suffering from a raging headache. I know you will be pleased with her; and I hope soon to present you."

The name of Inez brought up a train of bitter thoughts in the mind of our hero. He determined by one desperate effort to break the spell which this woman wove about him.

"Miss Careno," he said, "I regret that I must leave you. My dearest friend is now perhaps dying, if not already dead, stricken down by the hand of Don Manuel Rubio. I came here to-night with the intent to meet him, force another duel upon him, and kill him! As he is not here, I must seek him elsewhere."

At this the girl turned pale with horror.

"Oh, Mr. Hazeltine!" she cried, "you cannot—you must not do so terrible a thing!"

"I can, and will!" he replied, with dogged determination.

But, forgetful of all conventionalities, she caught his hands and detained him, as he was about to leave her. Then with rapid, eloquent words she denounced dueling as murder.

By his own confession he was seeking the life of a fellow mortal from a spirit of revenge. Did it lessen the crime to add suicide to murder? since he had no right to jeopardize his own life in vain. And what palliation was the fact that human law affixed no penalty, when God's law was so plain?

He was a Northern man, and all the weight of his early education lay with her line of argument. Indeed the project had been born of the spirit of recklessness that possessed him. He sought some desperate excitement to divert him from the fierce struggle that was going on in his breast.

She appealed to him in the name of his mother—of his sisters, if he had any. She told

him that Don Manuel was the lover of her cousin, Inez—this cousin who was more than a sister to her. Was he willing to break the heart of one so dear to her?

Lastly, she presented the danger to himself. And here her voice broke down, tears sprung to her eyes, and clinging to his hands, she begged him to promise that he would desist from his purpose.

In this crisis she who was the personification of modesty forgot maidenly reserve. The trammels of society fell away. That she had known him less than a week lost its significance. It was one soul crying out to another!

Great emotions transcend the rules applicable to the ordinary events of life. Noble natures then soar free. This woman lost nothing of her dignity in being true to the inspiration that was given her.

Harry was thrilled by the magnetism of this direct appeal. He was bewildered by a strange intoxication. How, he scarcely knew; but he gave the promise, and got away from her and out of the house.

Out in the darkness he found himself walking with hurried strides; and there were tears on his cheeks!

He dashed them away, and with set teeth reached his apartments.

Passing Vikir without a glance, he swept aside the curtain and seized the handle of the door. It resisted his fierce wrench. It was locked.

The West Indian braced himself for the crisis that was at hand. His dark skin became a sal-low yellow with pallor. He was resolved to defend his master against himself, with his life, if need be.

Then the storm burst!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LOATHSOME FATE.

WHEN Donna Inez retired from the parlors, after seeing her husband enter, she was a prey to fierce alternations of defiance and despair, pacing her room like a caged tigress, now wringing her hands, now clenching them—at one moment feeling as if she had the strength and courage to cope with him in a physical encounter, at the next prostrated by weakness and fear.

Before retiring to rest Paola entered her cousin's room, and found her already in bed, the tumbled drapery attesting her restlessness.

After sympathetic inquiry about Inez's indisposition, the girl expressed her regrets that it had prevented her cousin from meeting Mr. Hazeltine, but added the painful hostility of the latter toward Don Manuel, from which, however, she had dissuaded him.

To this recital Inez listened, lying with her face in shadow. Whatever may have been her emotions, she held them well under control. When it was done, she asked, pointedly:

"How came he to tell you this? Men do not usually babble such matters to women whom they have known scarcely an hour."

Paola blushed.

"I don't know," she said. "It was a sort of apology for taking his departure so early."

Donna Inez thought rapidly. Here was a new crisis. Why had he told this to Paola, and by what power had she dissuaded him?

Inez knew Harry's truthfulness. Having promised Paola, he would keep his word. Could it be true that he sought Don Manuel only to avenge his friend, not knowing that he had other cause for enmity? Then he could not have recognized him.

But might not his failure to recognize Don Manuel imply that he was ignorant of her identity also? Asa Dillingham had suggested this possibility.

Lastly, if he supposed her dead, and himself thus free, what was the significance of Paola's influence over him? For no one knew better than Inez the devoted friendship existing between Harry and Ned Taunton. Could he be in love with Paola already?

In any event, this much was certain:—the acquaintance with Mr. Hazeltine must go no further.

"Paola," said her cousin, "I know nothing of the excellencies of this gentleman; but his hostility toward Don Manuel must of course be an effectual barrier between him and me; and I think I know your heart well enough to feel confident that you cannot remain unpartisan."

"But, Inez, he has given up his enmity," urged Paola.

"Of course you are at liberty to do as you please," said Inez, coldly; "but I can never under any circumstances consent to meet him."

The gentle Paola was chilled, and with a depressed heart she sought her own room.

That night was to Donna Inez a night of torment. If Harry loved Paola and sought her society, the whole scheme must inevitably be defeated.

In the morning the trio of conspirators convened, and Inez said:

"The time for concealment is past. Thomas Kittridge, alias James Wetherby, the man whom you have last introduced into the bosom of your family, is my husband! Imagine the effect of this announcement upon my dear, confiding cousin, Paola. But these two have met, and, my word for it, are in love with each other, or will be, if further meeting is not prevented."

"Thomas Kittridge, alias James Wetherby, can you retrieve the blunder you have made?"

"She shall leave the city to-morrow," said her guardian, wincing under her iteration of his true name.

"Not so," objected Inez. "When she leaves the city, it must be in company with Leslie Mansfield, with a view to marrying him."

"Curse Leslie Mansfield!" growled Asa Dillingham, with an ugly scowl.

"Ello! what's the matter with you?" asked Wetherby, while Inez stared in surprise.

"Look here," said Dillingham. "I'm ugly; but I'm flesh and blood; and, demme! I'm in love with this little woman myself."

"The deuce you are!" cried Wetherby. Inez smiled contemptuously.

"I've got another plan to propose," pursued Dillingham. "Let me have the girl; and we can divide the money just the same."

"A capital plan!" laughed Wetherby.

"Open to two or three slight objections, however," added Inez.

"What objections?"

"You rosebud of innocence!" cried Wetherby; "do you think we'd trust such a knave as you? When you 'ad the girl, and through 'er the title to the money, 'ow nicely you'd set hus adrift!"

"With the prospect of your splitting on me?"

"And going to prison for conspiracy, hem-bezzlement, and the Lord knows what all! Oh, no!—not for Joe!"

"But more than that, it would be impossible to force her into a marriage with you," added Inez. "My dear sir, there is a limit to human endurance. She would appeal to the public for protection."

"Ha! ha! ha! Hit's your beauty, Hasa!" laughed Wetherby. "Why, man, if a woman were to marry you voluntarily, hany court would set the contract aside on the ground of hinsanity!"

Asa Dillingham smiled, putting his clammy fingers to his livid lips, and his basilisk eyes glittered in very unpleasant fashion. Perhaps he did not forego his purpose.

"Enough of this!" interposed Inez, impatiently. "Mr. Hazeltine must be excluded from the house, and our first plan pushed at once. There is no need of longer delay. Let Paola be notified of what she has to expect to-day."

That afternoon Paola was called into her guardian's presence.

"My dear," began Wetherby, with some nervousness, "I have sent for you on a very important matter—vital, I may say, to your 'ole future."

"To what can you refer?" asked the girl, curiously.

"You are now twenty years of hage?"

"Last month."

"Most women are married before that hage."

"But I don't want to marry, guardie."

"Nevertheless, it would be better for you."

"But I don't love any one."

"A school-girl's notion!—the effect of the license hallowed young people in this country. But fortunately you were born to wiser customs. By the provisions of your father's will I take 'is place in heverything; and hacting as I know 'e would 'ave hacted, I 'ave selected a 'usband for you."

"Oh, guardie!"

"In Hingland, as in Spain, and wherever children are 'eld in subjection to their parents or guardians, a light pair of 'eels isn't considered sufficient qualification for a 'usband. I 'ave selected a man with money and social position. None of your fly-aways; but a solid man of business—one 'oo will give you an establishment."

"Whom, guardie?" asked the girl, breathlessly.

"Hasa Dillingham!"

"Asa Dillingham!"

The girl stared, and then burst into a laugh. "Why, guardie," she said, "I thought you were in earnest. You look as sober as a judge."

"And why shouldn't I be in earnest?" demanded Wetherby, in a tone of dogged severity. "I don't see hanything to hexcite you to mirth."

"Oh! but Mr. Dillingham!"

"Well, Mr. Dillingham, a man known and highly respected by your mother."

"And therefore altogether too old for me!" said Paola, quickly—"not to add that he *isn't* handsome."

"Andsome is as 'andsome does! As for hage, holder men 'ave married younger women, and 'appily, too. But, sentiment aside, Mr. Dillingham is a man hevery way worthy of you. 'E 'as proposed to me for your 'and; and is ready to settle twenty thousand pounds sterling on you the day of your marriage. There's no non-sense about twenty thousand pound!"

"But I'd rather not sell myself, even for so high a figure!" Paola persisted.

"My dear, I 'ave hexpressed my wishes. Of course I hexpect obedience. Mr. Dillingham leaves for Hingland six weeks from to-day. I 'ave promised 'im that 'is bride shall be ready for 'im."

"Oh, uncle—"

"No more at present. You will begin your preparations at once. If you will hexcuse me, I will take my hafter-dinner nap."

With white lips and whirling brain Paola left the library, sought her cousin Inez and cast herself weeping into her arms.

It was the bird going to the serpent for protection and sympathy!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

WITH a terrible frown Harry Hazeltine whirled upon his servant.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried, shaking the door with unreasoning impatience.

"*Excellenza*, do you forget that the door is locked in accordance with your orders?"

"Open it at once!"

"Pardon, *excellenza*. You charged me to retain the key, no matter what happened, or what you might do."

"Well, I have changed my mind. I revoke the command. Produce the key."

"Still pardon, *excellenza*. It is not your better self that speaks now."

"What! Dare you palter with me?"

"You made it a test of my love."

"You refuse to obey me?"

"I must protect you from yourself."

"Slave!" thundered the enraged master.

White with fury he leaped upon the devoted Vikir, clutched him by the throat, dashed him to the floor with one sweep of his powerful arm, and planted a foot on his breast.

The West Indian offered no resistance; but gazing up into his master's face with sorrowing reproach, he said:

"*Excellenza*, my life is yours. Take it! And when I am dead, thinking why I died, your nobler self will gain the ascendancy. You will be saved! For me, it is enough to know that Vikir never failed the master he loved, and to whom he owed so much."

At these words—at this devotion, a swift transition took place in Harry's feelings.

Lifting his faithful servant up, he cried, with tears in his eyes:

"Forgive me, Vikir! Your generosity overwhelms me with shame. My friend, you are right. Your devotion *shall* save me. I will never enter that accursed room again!"

"*Excellenza*, again I recognize you!" cried Vikir, falling upon his knees and covering his master's hand with kisses. "How proud and happy am I that my love prevails!"

"Vikir, it will prevail, if you stand firm."

"*Excellenza*, may I ask a favor?"

"Anything, Vikir, after the wrong I have done you."

"Speak not of that, my master. It is for you alone that I think. While you are strong in good resolves, put the temptation forever away from you. Let me enter yonder and destroy the demon!"

Harry hesitated.

"*Excellenza*, are you sincere in the purpose you have avowed?"

"Yes, Vikir."

"Then why cling to that which destroys?"

"My faithful friend, my brother, do as you wish!" cried Harry, putting all vacillation resolutely from him.

"*Excellenza, mil gracias!* We shall triumph!" cried Vikir, delightedly.

But good resolves did not lay the demon of unrest which possessed Harry Hazeltine. A woman—one of the hated and distrusted sex—had seduced him from his loyalty to his friend. More than this, he had to confess to himself what he had not revealed to Vikir, that considerations of her had much to do with his abandonment of that room which the West Indian said contained the curse of his life.

Making inquiry at Captain Taunton's hotel, he learned that Ned was sleeping.

He found it intolerable to wait in one place, and so set out in the darkness to walk until exhaustion should subdue his excitement.

Alone in the stillness and solitude of the night, he thought of Paola, and of that other who had wrecked his life. And gradually his spirit took on some of the tranquillity of the calm sky.

One thing that Paola had said recurred to his mind. She had appealed to him in the name of his mother, and of his sister, if he had one.

Now he remembered how in all his childish griefs he had gone to his mother's breast, as to a sure haven. He recalled the calm, steady light of her eye, her gentle touch, her love that never failed, and last the holy serenity of her face when she died in the hope of immortality. She had been a good woman!

There had been a little sister, too, who used to romp with him. He heard again her childish laugh of rippling music. The memory of her innocent smile shot athwart his mental vision like a ray of sunshine. How quickly, too, had sprung to her eye the sympathetic tear.

And all these things seemed to have their counterpart in Paola. It was as if the spirits of the departed had come back to woo him from his cynicism through her smile.

Oh! if he could trust her! His heart hungered for love—for woman's love. His mother—his sister—they had been true. He could never doubt them. And she was so like them!

But then the image of Inez with her fair seeming rose before his imagination; and dragging his hat over his eyes and clenching his teeth to keep back the bitter curses, the man strode on.

So waged the conflict until with the dawn he sought again his friend, and afterward went to his own apartments, to snatch a little sleep.

He noticed a look of suspense on Vikir's face. Opening the door to his sleeping apartment, he stopped on the threshold.

The curtain was gone. The door to the mysterious chamber stood wide open. The room itself, made cheerful by the morning sunlight streaming in through an open window, now contained nothing more terrible than easy-chairs, and books and papers and writing materials.

Harry Hazeltine turned pale, and bent upon his servant a look of awakening displeasure.

"Vikir!"

"*Excellenza*, you have crossed into the enemy's country, and in the terrible struggle that is at hand you must feel that the bridges are burnt behind you."

In the face of the West Indian there was an impressive blending of humility and firmness.

"Vikir, you are right," said his master, touching his hand. "You have cut off all chance of retreat. I shall depend solely on your wisdom and sustaining strength."

"*Gracias, excellenza!*"

Thus began a struggle which was to call into play all the physical and mental resources of this man. To sustain the fight he might draw inspiration from Vikir's devotion and Paola's purity!

But the enemy would make terrible havoc with him. She must not see him again until he was victorious. But he must see her. And in disguise he sought a fashionable park, where she drove every day. Little did she know the burning glances cast at her by an elderly gentleman who was almost altogether hidden by a jasmine vine which burdened an elm by the wayside.

But from this covert Harry saw her; and beside her rode a woman who was always veiled and had the air of an invalid.

Perhaps this companion was the cousin whom he had missed seeing? But Harry had no time to look at one in whom he felt no interest. His attention was fixed by Paola's face.

In it was an unwonted pallor and a look of distress which increased from day to day. What did it mean?

If he could but fly to her, he would stand between her and every sorrow. But he could not. She would have been startled by his altered appearance.

A terrible change had taken place in him.

His face was haggard; his eyes were staring, with almost the glitter of insanity; his nerves twitched and he was possessed by a restlessness which drove him from place to place like the scourge of a Nemesis.

Only one thing could fix his attention for more than a moment at a time. He found where Paola's driver was in the habit of stopping, to breathe his horses and give the ladies a view of the animated scene presented by the fashionable drive thronged with gay equipages.

Here, screened by some foliage, he could sit and watch the face of the woman he loved. The frightened look in her eyes, which he had not seen there before, fascinated him, until he forgot the pain that thrilled every nerve of his body.

But before we recount the result of this espionage, we must touch upon another event which occurred some days previous to the point we have now reached in our narrative.

Two nights subsequent to the night of Paola's reception Vikir was passing alone through the streets when he came face to face with Don Manuel Rubio.

At sight of the Don, Vikir stopped with a smothered ejaculation, while his eyes gleamed with sudden fire, and his hand sought the handle of his dagger.

The recognition must have been mutual, for Don Manuel turned a sickly yellow with pallor. But he passed on without seeming to notice the West Indian.

"*Caramba!*" reflected the Spaniard. "Both have escaped the sea! And I am recognized! This devil will hunt me down! Ah! as I thought, he is following me!"

"Pablo Garcia!" was Vikir's mental ejaculation; and, turning, he followed the Spaniard at a little distance.

Now hot, tropical hatred gleamed in his eyes. He was tracking his man with the fierceness of some wild beast in his native clime.

Without seeming to notice that he was followed, Don Manuel kept on. He was planning some way to dispose of this implacable enemy.

He could not appeal to the law for protection. Publicity meant death on the scaffold, as a murderer.

Leaving the crowded thoroughfare, he worked his way toward a disreputable part of the city. Gallatin street, with its dark alleys, where crime lurked as a wild beast in its lair, offered him the opportunity he sought.

Walking rapidly, with the consciousness that Vikir was close behind him, perhaps intending to close in and avenge the murderous assault, years ago, on his master, Don Manuel turned a sharp corner and stopped.

The dismal, ill-lighted street was deserted. Some distance away he saw the light from a red-curtained window, and heard the discordant music, and harsh voices raised in the bacchanal revel of some sailors' dance-house.

Drawing a pistol, he grasped it by the barrel firmly, and waited.

Vikir came round the corner.

There was a rush, a blow, and without a groan the West Indian fell to the ground. His enemy had outwitted him!

But a dark form started from the shadow. A heavy hand fell on Don Manuel's shoulder.

"Eh! you accursed bravo—"

But the words of the policeman were cut short.

A swift blow, and he reeled against the building, while his prisoner fled precipitately.

The man was only partially stunned. He had presence of mind enough to spring his rattle, and a moment later started in pursuit.

Responding whirrs sounded in other directions, and the fall of hurrying feet came through the night.

Several guardians of the peace assembled, but their man had eluded them in the darkness.

Returning, they took the unconscious Vikir to a station-house. On his recovery he stated that he had been attacked while going about his business. So the affair passed as an ordinary attempt at robbery.

But to his master Vikir said:

"*Excellenza*, Pablo Garcia is in the city!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FALSE COUSIN.

WITH a look of lively concern in her face, Donna Inez received the weeping Paola in her arms.

"Why, what is the matter, dear?" she asked. "Oh, Inez, the most terrible thing! I can scarcely believe it!"

"Why, what *can* be the matter?"

"Uncle insists that I must be married; and to whom do you think?"

"Married!—you?"

"I had no thought of such a thing until he called me into the library just now."

"But to whom, Paola?"

"You could never guess. Asa Dillingham!"

"Oh, monstrous!"

Donna Inez's indignation was well played.

"I would rather die!" sighed Paola.

"Oh, it cannot be! That hideous ghoul! It is sacrilegious! Paola, your guardian cannot be in earnest?"

"He is. Mr. Dillingham has proposed for my hand, and purposes to have everything over in six weeks, when he leaves for England."

"But you cannot marry such a repulsive creature, dear. I almost scream at his disgusting touch."

Paola shivered and shuddered, and shrunk more closely in the arms of her false cousin.

"There, dear," said Inez, soothingly, "don't let it trouble you. I will go to Mr. Wetherby, myself."

"Inez, tell him that I should die—"

"Of course you would, dear."

And leaving Paola in an agony of suspense, Donna Inez descended to the library.

"Well?" asked Wetherby, who had been joined by the worthy scare-crow.

"The little fool has made me her embassador extraordinary, and minister plenipotentiary!" laughed Inez.

"Is she disposed to yield obedience, if the project is insisted upon?" asked Dillingham.

"I am commissioned to say that she would consider death at the stake an inestimable boon, in preference!"

Wetherby laughed.

Dillingham coughed behind his hand.

There was a wicked light in his eyes. He had his own projects. He bided his time!

"Ave you suggested the elopement?" asked Wetherby.

"That will not be ripe for three or four weeks yet. Stand firm, and leave the rest to me."

"Oh, I'll be firm enough," laughed Wetherby.

"There's little danger of your being troubled with tenderness of heart," sneered Dillingham.

So these accomplices, who hated each other quite as much, if not more, than their intended victim, snarled among themselves, until it came time for Inez to return to her waiting cousin.

When she did so, she seemed divided between indignation and hopelessness.

"Oh, Paola, my dear cousin!" she cried, taking the hapless girl in her arms, "this *must* be put a stop to, somehow; but your guardian is determined. I have used every argument in my power; but he only says he knows what is best for you."

To an American girl, educated to perfect freedom of choice in the selection of a life partner, the despair with which Paola received this intelligence will hardly be conceivable.

Because he could not afford to have an unnecessary number of accomplices, James Wetherby had dispensed with the duenna, which a Spanish girl would have had according to the custom of her own country. In consequence, Paola had enjoyed enough freedom to know its sweets. Now it would be impossible for her to yield herself to the will of her guardian, in matters of the heart, with that perfect docility which European education engenders.

On the other hand, early habits of thought had their force; and the possibility of taking a decided stand in opposition to the authority constituted over her did not suggest itself to her mind with the readiness with which it would have come to one of her American sisters.

So, instead of compelling her fate, this gentle creature shrunk cowering beneath the crushing blow that had fallen upon her.

It was Inez's cue, at this stage of the proceedings, to make the prospect as hopeless as possible, so that any avenue of escape would look the more inviting by contrast; and to have seen the two girls weeping in each other's arms, an observer would have been puzzled to decide which was the more broken-hearted.

Society is a hard taskmaster to a beautiful woman, and will grant little time for the indulgence of private griefs; but that evening Donna Inez declared that Paola looked like a fright, and must not be seen by company. As for Paola, she was glad to be relieved from prying eyes, on the plea of indisposition.

So Donna Inez received Leslie Mansfield when he called.

She made him stay until all the others had gone. Then she sat down opposite him and began a new scene in her little drama.

"Mr. Mansfield," she said, with unshed tears

springing to her eyes, "I want your help. It's about poor, dear Paola."

"What about her?" asked the young man, anxiously.

"I am going to repose a great trust in you," she said, evading a direct answer. "I want your man's strength; I want your man's self-control; I want your man's readiness in emergency; but most of all I want all your truth and honor and tenderness. Oh, Leslie! if you fail me!"

"But what is it all about?" cried the bewildered Leslie.

"Mr. Mansfield, Paola's guardian has entertained a proposal for her hand in marriage!"

"And does Paola—"

"She never thought of such a thing, until Mr. Wetherby announced that he had selected her husband."

"The deuce he has! Why, the old duffer!" was Mr. Mansfield's characteristic ejaculation.

"Paola and I are broken-hearted," sighed Inez.

"Well, I don't see that there is any occasion for such despair."

"But what can she do?"

"Do! Why, tell her venerated uncle and guardian that she don't approve his choice. There couldn't be a much simpler way."

"But you forget the difference between your American customs and those in which we have been educated."

"Education be—*disregarded!* And is a lady to be disposed of like a bale of merchandise, in accordance with a piece of fossiliferous barbarism? This is the nineteenth century, my dear Donna Inez."

But Inez shook her head.

"There are but two ways in which a Spanish woman can escape a marriage which her parents or guardians have arranged for her."

"And they are?"

"First, she may have recourse to the church—"

"A nunnery!" cried Leslie, in dismay.

Inez bowed.

"By Heaven! Paola Careno shall not enter a convent to escape any man living!" cried the lover, starting to his feet.

"I like to see you show such spirit," said Donna Inez. "It suggests the other way."

"What other way?"

"If there is one who loves her, and has the courage and address to run away with her, when she is once his wife she is free."

Leslie caught his breath. Here was a contingency of which he had never dreamed. Might she be induced to marry him to escape one more distasteful to her?

Leslie, as we have said, was not a man of fine feeling. The idea of accepting a wife on these terms was not shocking to him. His love was of that order which asks only for possession—by hook or by crook.

But, recalling Paola's decisive rejection, he shook his head.

"She wouldn't elope with me," he said, gloomily.

"Don't be too sure. There is nothing repulsive about you. She don't dislike you."

"No, I think not."

"Well, she might prefer you to a man whose touch she cannot endure without a shudder."

"Who is it?" asked Leslie, with sudden interest.

"Asa Dillingham!"

Leslie Mansfield was not so greatly shocked as Inez had expected. Her own words had led him to think of the possibility of Dillingham's money compensating for his personal unattractiveness.

However, he flushed angrily and his eyes flashed, as he asked:

"And will she sell herself to that—"

"Haven't I told you that she shudders at his touch?"

"I suppose a woman would marry the devil, if he had money enough!" said Leslie, bitterly.

"No power on earth could induce Paola to marry Asa Dillingham voluntarily."

"Well, I will propose an elopement, if you think it will do any good."

Plainly Leslie was not over-sanguine.

"Not now," objected Inez. "These things can't be done abruptly. You don't understand women. I don't want my cousin to take the veil; and I don't want her to go to that odious monster. But I have rather favored you from the first; and if you will follow my directions, you shall marry her."

"For the next three or four weeks you must show that you are greatly distressed, not merely at the prospect of losing her yourself, but for her own sake, because of the unhappiness that is before her. You must in every way

possible put yourself in contrast with Asa Dillingham. The more repulsive he is, the more she will look to you for relief."

"During this time you refrain from suggesting any way of escape; but as the time set for her marriage approaches you grow desperate, and end by proposing that she give herself to you."

"In all this I will aid you; and we shall succeed."

"I will go now, and call her down to see you out here on the veranda. You must play the sympathetic brother, avowedly. She will not be deceived by this nomenclature; but there is a great deal in the names we give things."

Leaving Leslie a prey to hopes and fears, Inez sought her cousin.

"Paola," she said, taking her in her arms, "I have told poor Leslie everything!"

"Oh, Inez! How could you?" cried Paola, in dismay.

"Remember, dear, he saved your life; and we must have some friend to counsel with in this terrible matter. He is down-stairs now in great distress, and wants to see you."

Of course Paola was full of feminine objections; and equally of course Inez overruled them all, until in the end her cousin crept down-stairs in the charming *negligé* of a wrapper, to meet the man whom no substitution of terms could make anything but her lover, while Inez stood in the doorway to warn them of intrusion, should Wetherby or Dillingham appear.

Although she would have been shocked by the suggestion of such a thing, Paola felt vaguely that this meeting had a clandestine air. Inez was playing her cards skillfully. Already these three were in league against the oppressive guardian and the objectionable suitor. This was the first step in the preparation of Paola for the proposal of an elopement.

From that interview Paola retired to her room more oppressed than before, if possible. Leslie had outdone himself in diplomacy. By making it appear that he had so fully given up the hope of winning her that his sympathy was disinterested, he won her confidence, and she leaned upon him as a true friend. At the same time she felt that he was utterly wretched, with a lover's wretchedness.

After a sleepless night, in which Inez did not leave her, Paola rose the shadow of her wonted bright self.

Then the false cousin suggested an appeal to Asa Dillingham; and though her sensitive nature revolted, Paola was finally induced to seek this last resource.

Alas! she fell all hopelessly into the snare her enemy spread.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DRIVEN TO THE WALL.

As a last resort Paola resolved to appeal to Asa Dillingham. No doubt the man's vanity would be wounded; but when he came to see her repugnance to the union he must withdraw his suit.

Her sensitive nature shrunk from such an interview with an embarrassment which nothing short of so vital a crisis would have overcome. Even as it was, she put it off from day to day, until Donna Inez said:

"Paola, dear, I know how painful is your position; but it is due Mr. Dillingham that you speak to him at once. He may construe your silence into a tacit acceptance. No doubt he has refrained from referring to the subject from motives of delicacy."

Then, nerving herself, the unhappy girl sought this monster whose hideousness was to force her into an abdication of her inheritance.

"Mr. Dillingham," she said, "may I see you a few moments in private?"

"Certainly, my dear—certainly," said the arch-hypocrite, raising his puffy hand to his livid lips. "The library is unoccupied. Allow me!"

How like a human lizard he looked, as he gazed at her over his hand with his small, basilisk eyes! And when with a bow of marked deference, horribly suggestive of his lover-like relations, he drew her hand within his arm, the girl shuddered from head to foot.

On the other hand, Dillingham looked upon this dainty morsel of femininity with the instinct of a vampire. He knew that association with him would sap all its freshness and beauty. But he resolved to enjoy it while it lasted.

He had formed his plans. He would let this scheme go on, until the girl had forfeited her patrimony to escape him. Then this young dandy, with his blonde mustache and faded

eyes, would be removed! How, Dillingham did not specify; but he would be removed. Then, in her widowhood and poverty, Dillingham would seek his victim again, and by the power her money—the spoil of his villainy—gave him, would force her into the very union she had fled in such loathing.

Seating her, he placed himself opposite, and rubbing his hands softly on his knees, while he gloated on her troubled face, waited for her to open the conversation.

"Mr. Dillingham," she began, with an effort, "my guardian has told me of your wishes regarding myself—"

"My dear Paola!" cried Dillingham, with a simulated burst of feeling, bending forward to clasp her hands.

But with an involuntary shudder of disgust the girl shrunk back in her chair and drew her hands away.

"Oh, pray—excuse me!" she stammered. "I think you misunderstand. I wanted to say—"

"Paola, you accede to my wishes, and your uncle's, of course?"

"I never thought of you in that way," protested the girl.

"But as my wife you will have every advantage. I can give you an establishment that no commoner of the Old Country need be ashamed of. On the day you become my wife I shall be ready with the settlement of twenty thousand pounds. This with your own fortune will give you command of a very comfortable sum. I have arranged everything satisfactorily with your guardian, who has full powers to act for you, so that you have nothing to do but to step gracefully into your appointed niche."

He smiled in a way intended to be conciliatory; but the result was the revelation of a more hideous phase of his ugliness.

Feeling that she was hopelessly in the toils of this serpent, the girl struggled feebly.

"But I have come to ask you to release my guardian from his engagement. I do not love you as a wife should. And—and—"

The words died on her lips. Dillingham smiled indulgently.

"You are not a sentimental school-girl, my dear," he said. "Of course you know that love smacks of poverty, stuffy apartments on a back street, and weekly arguments with the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker; while common sense looks to position in life. I don't think you'd give a hundred thousand dollars for a month in Fool's Paradise. At any rate, your guardian, knowing the world, will look to your interests better than that."

"I shall be very proud of my wife," he went on; "and nothing that money can procure by way of a setting to her beauty shall be wanting. She shall be like the lilies of the field—"

"My dear!"

His sudden ejaculation was caused by a deathly pallor that overspread her face. It was the signal of shipwrecked hope.

He started forward to assist her; but she waved him back.

"It is nothing," she said, rising to her feet hurriedly.

And feeling as if she should die if left a moment longer in the company of this monster, she hastened out of the room.

The bird had made an effort in vain. Crushed by this failure, she was more hopeless than before.

Inez waited to receive her.

"Oh, my darling!" cried the traitress.

With a moan, Paola sunk into her arms.

"He has refused to release you?" cried Inez, with simulated indignation.

"Oh, I wish I might die!" sighed the hapless victim.

"This is monstrous! The hideous toad! He shall be made to free you! I shall outwit him yet!"

"Nina, it's of no use. Guardie is determined, and he has no feeling."

"But it shall not be! I will forbid the bans myself. No priest can be found so cruel as to marry a beautiful young girl to such a frightful ghoul! It would be sacrilege!"

All of which had very much the appearance of an unreasoning outburst of generous indignation.

That night Leslie Mansfield paced the floor in a very belligerent frame of mind, seemingly, inveighing against obdurate guardians and elderly suitors of unprepossessing person in no flattering terms.

"By Jove!" he cried, "this iniquity shall never be consummated! If he persists, I will pick a quarrel with him and call him out. Paola, I will save you, or at least lay down my poor life in your defense!"

"Oh, Mr. Mansfield!" cried Inez, with simulated lively concern, "you are so generous! But you must not do that. It is wicked. Good cannot come of evil."

"If Paola is saved, will not that be a great good?" asked the lover, in true lover-like style.

"But you must not jeopardize your life for me," said Paola, who had a woman's awe of a man's anger, and faith in the terrible execution of the blank cartridges of masculine wrath.

Then Leslie caught her hands; and words, whose utterance he stifled, seemed to rise in his throat. But his face was eloquent of a lover's devotion, so humble, so hopeless, withal, that she remembered only the pain of being denied the one he loved sufficiently to lay down his life for her; and in her grateful tenderness forgot to withdraw her hands.

Paola's indifference to Leslie had arisen from a feeling that he was essentially light weight. Now the strength of his love for her and his seeming bravery redeemed him somewhat in her eyes. She began to pity him with a pity which did not detract from her respect for him.

She was in a dangerous position. He was her only consoler.

Had she been more intimate with Harry Hazeltine, his influence might have saved her. But after that first real meeting he had never sought her again.

With watchful eye Inez noted all these slight indications.

"The time is nearly at hand," she said, to Leslie, having him alone. "Don't spoil everything by precipitancy. Let her see what is in your mind, but don't speak until I give you leave."

On the morrow, acting under Donna Inez's instruction, James Wetherby called his ward to him, and said:

"My dear, what preparations have you made for your *trousseau*?"

"Oh, uncle!" cried the poor girl, "I cannot—I cannot marry Mr. Dillingham! Oh, I shall die of wretchedness!"

Assuming an expression of dignified displeasure, the false guardian said sternly:

"My dear, that question is no longer hunder discussion. I've arranged as I thought most advisable for you, just as I would've provided for my hown child. To show you 'ow poorly you are requiting Mr. Dillingham's hinterest in you, I will tell you what hotherwise would've been a secret until your wedding-day. In contrast with your procrastinations, 'e 'as already hordered a bridal present worthy of a princess. It is a necklace of diamonds of the purest water, and of a size that will hexcite the henry of all New Orleans. They will cost not a cent less than ten thousand dollars. Such munificence is worthy of some recognition. I shall hexpect you to make suitable harrangements for the hevent of your life, beginning with to-day. I give you *carte blanche*. Make your selections, and send the bills to me."

How everything smacked of the slave market. The purchase money was a hundred thousand dollars in settlements and a ten thousand-dollar necklace!

Paola turned sick at heart.

"There is another ceremony fixed for to-day," pursued Wetherby. "Mr. Dillingham 'as 'ad your hengagement ring made to horder; and it is worthy of 'is princely munificence. 'E is now hawaiting you hin the drawing-room. I 'ope you will do nothing to wound 'is sensibilities. Go to 'im at once."

With leaden feet Paola obeyed. She was now beyond the power of protest.

Dillingham advanced to receive her with outstretched hands. The triumphant smile on his ghastly face was horrible beyond parallel.

Dumb with anguish, Paola submitted passively.

He took her hands and held them, gazing into her face with gloating exultation.

"My darling!" he cried, "this is the happiest moment of my life! See!"

He slipped a ring on her finger. It was a great, dazzling *solitaire*.

"Now I feel that you are indeed mine!" he cried.

The girl stood with downcast eyes, almost fainting. She felt that the fetters were being riveted one by one.

Suddenly Dillingham threw his arm about her and drew her toward him, while his repulsive face with its livid lips approached hers.

At this insupportable menace the girl uttered a scream, and exerting the strength of despair, tore herself free and fled from the room.

As usual Inez's arms were ready to receive her, and Inez's distress seemed almost equal to her own.

When Leslie was informed of this last out-

rage, he knelt at her feet, and bowing his head into her lap, covered her hands with tears and kisses.

"My poor darling!" he cried, as if unconscious of the terms he selected, "how you suffer! But you shall not be sacrificed—I swear it! This unholy marriage shall never—never take place!"

And the girl, not resenting his manifestations of affection, clung to his hands, and moaned:

"I shall die!—oh, I shall die!"

The days that followed were days of keenest torture to the shrinking, sensitive girl. They were the days when her distress was so apparent to Harry Hazeltine.

With diabolical ingenuity she was thrown almost constantly into the society of the most repulsive man she had ever seen.

Leslie Mansfield's visits were now avowedly clandestine, in that he was with her almost all the time that her company was not claimed by her persecutor. He came in the afternoon when Dillingham was taking his siesta, and stayed at night to see her a few minutes before she retired, after she had escaped from him.

So the days passed, until, yielding to bodily weakness and terror at her approaching nuptials, Paola clung helplessly in Inez's arms, and cried:

"Oh, save me! save me! some way! any way! I must get away from here! I must escape! Oh, Inez! help me!"

Then the heart of the arch-plotter leaped for joy.

"You little fool!" she thought, "I've got you now!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STUNNING BLOW.

THE announcement by Vikir that Pablo Garcia was in New Orleans had little effect on Harry Hazeltine. He listened to the story of his servant without comment. Racked by physical as well as mental pain, he was too apathetic to wish to avenge the attempted murder of so many years ago, or to attach any importance to the fact that Pablo Garcia now appeared in the dress of a gentleman.

In the days that followed his sufferings increased until he was scarcely accountable for his actions. In the place of refreshing sleep, a perturbed torpor would come upon him whenever nature became thoroughly exhausted.

He would be prostrated by fits of brooding melancholy, when the watchful Vikir feared that he might attempt suicide. This might be relieved at any moment by a burst of unreasoning rage.

Vikir was ever vigilant, ever kind, ever firm. His tact parried every danger.

Meanwhile Captain Taunton was convalescent. But, when he saw Harry's state, which puzzled him exceedingly, he was deterred more than ever from speaking of his meeting with one who looked like Donna Inez.

One day when Paola's suffering had goaded her lover to the verge of distraction, he went to his old friend and told him the whole situation.

"Ned," he said, in conclusion, "I've fought this as long as I can. I give up. I can't go to her looking like a maniac. But I must know what it is that is distressing her. I've determined to put some one in that house who will find out and tell me. I don't like that guardian of hers; and there's a man at his elbow who wouldn't stop at anything. She's got money, and they may be deviling her somehow."

"Ned, if I can win that woman, I'm going to marry her; and if she turns out like all the rest of the accursed crew, I'll bring the game to a sudden termination, as far as I'm concerned!"

Then he announced his determination to go for Kalma. He would find means of getting her into Wetherby's household, and if there was anything wrong she could unearth it.

"Old fellow," said Ned, with the old affection in his tone, though the hand he gave his friend was very limp with weakness, "I hope this may turn out fortunately for you, for you deserve a happier life than you have had. I'm acquainted with a Leslie Mansfield who is intimate in that quarter; and while you're gone I'll learn what I can about the family."

After this Harry embarked for Havana. He was drawn thither by a sort of fascination. He wanted to see the old, familiar places once more. Before he committed himself finally to seek Paola, he must have definite proof of the death of the woman who had flashed across his life like a thunderbolt, illuminating all with dazzling brightness for a moment, but leaving destruction and blacker darkness.

He walked the streets of the island capital. No one knew him. The Convent of St. Celestine loomed grim and silent over the bay. Strangers were in the villa that had once been his.

Inexpressibly sad, the man stood looking on the scene of his greatest happiness and greatest misery, when he heard some one approaching. It proved to be a negress in whom he recognized one of his former household servants.

The woman did not recognize him at first, he was so changed; but when he spoke to her by name, she looked more closely, then started back in affright, crying:

"Oh, *Virgen Santissima!*"

"You need not fear me, Bettina," he said. "I wish to ask you a question or two."

"And I will answer truly, master," said the woman, in Spanish.

"Of your mistress? You know how I left her," was all that Harry could say.

"She went away, my master, and we were sold to Señor Filippo Massina."

"What do you say? She went away?" stammered Harry.

"I do not know where, my master."

"But—she did not—die?"

"*Santissima*, no!" cried the woman, crossing herself.

Here was a blow for which the man was not prepared. He had never entertained the thought that his shot might not have proved fatal. Two months ago he would have felt relieved to know that her blood, though shed by accident, was not on his hands. But now she rose up like an ominous phantom between him and Paola.

The woman could give but little more intelligence. A *caballero* had come to the villa shortly after the departure of the unfortunate husband. He had held a brief interview with the wounded lady and then gone away. Donna Inez had recovered, and left her household to be sold by an agent.

With a dull, dead despair Harry went again to the city. While he was waiting for a vessel he wandered through the streets, mingling with the crowd, a man with eyes that saw not, and ears that heard not.

In a dim sort of fashion the light and gayety of the fashionable thoroughfares seemed to jar upon his melancholy. So he wandered on through unfrequented streets, lighted poorly by lanterns hung across the way, or jutting sconces.

Contrary to custom he was not followed by Vikir, having otherwise employed him.

In a dark, deserted spot he heard a stealthy footfall behind him, and turned just in time to catch a descending wrist the hand of which grasped a dagger which had been aimed at his back, just between the shoulder-blades.

By a skillful twist of the arm which he held and a wrestler's trip of the foot, he threw the would-be assassin on his back.

"Now, *pelado*, why should I not drive your own treacherous dagger to your heart?" he cried, planting a knee on the baffled villain's breast. "Would you murder me for a few pitiful pesos?"

"Hold, señor!" cried the bravo. "Spare me, and I will redeem my life!"

"Redeem your life?"

"If you kill me, you strike but the poor fool. Your enemy can easily hire another."

"What! You have been hired to assassinate me?"

"*Si, señor.* And would it not be worth so poor a life as mine to know your enemy? What am I? You would scorn to strike me so far beneath you!"

"True, dog! The lash would be more in keeping than a blow from the hand of a gentleman. But what evidence shall I have of your good faith? Who, employing an assassin, would let himself be known to him?"

"Señor, when I mention the name you will know whether he is your enemy or not. For the rest, he did not know that I recognized him; but it was so."

"What is his name?"

"You will not slay me?"

"No."

"On the honor of a gentleman?"

"Fellow! is not my word sufficient with such scum as thou!"

"*Si, señor!* A thousand pardons!" whined the cowardly ruffian.

"The name! The name!" demanded Harry.

"Don Manuel Rubio!"

"Ah!"

After that ejaculation Harry's mind set about collating several isolated facts, and deducing their significance taken in conjunction.

In his abstraction he forgot the discomfort of

the villain whom his knee yet pinned to the ground, until that worthy gasped:

"Señor, you will not forget your promise?"

"Who is this Don Manuel Rubio?" asked Harry, ignoring the question which told the wretch's anxiety.

"He was one of the revolutionists—a colonel—compelled to fly the Island."

"But he is here now!—to have hired you."

"He is in disguise."

"What if he were taken by the authorities?"

"He would be shot, señor."

"Look you, *señor lepero*," said Harry, with sudden decision. "How much money did Don Manuel Rubio promise you for my assassination?"

"A hundred pesos, señor."

"What! would you kill a man for such a trifle?"

"I could hire a score of *bravos* for that, señor."

"Infamous wretches!" cried our hero.

"Well, I ask of you that in which there is less risk than to attempt the life of a man, even by your coward's blow in the back; and I will pay you better than Don Manuel. Can you betray him to the authorities to-night?"

"Undoubtedly, señor."

"Arise! Follow me! But look you! I do not depend on the money I shall give you. If you are not faithful to me the Island will not be big enough to hide you from my revenge!"

"Señor, I swear—"

"Bah! your oath is good for nothing! The only thing you value is your worthless life. I hold you by that. Here is my address. When Don Manuel is a prisoner come to me. Your reward will await you."

"Señor, do you permit me to go unattended?" asked the craven, scarcely daring to hope that he was indeed free.

"Have I not told you that I would have no difficulty finding you, if I should want you?"

"*Gracias! mil gracias, señor!*" whined the fellow, with a profound obeisance.

"Go!" commanded Harry.

The bravo backed away, still bowing.

Harry turned on his heel and pursued his way.

In Don Manuel Rubio and Pablo Garcia Harry thought he recognized the lover of his false wife. Here was a chance to punish him for his two attempts at murder, and for Ned Taunton's wound, without Harry thrusting himself into the notoriety incident to a trial for murderous assault.

The bravo was true to the trust which he dared not neglect, and Don Manuel was arrested.

On the following day he was tried, with Spanish expedition where political offenders are concerned, and his execution fixed for the morning subsequent at sunrise.

Harry saw him at the trial; and the recognition was mutual.

That night Don Manuel wrote to Donna Inez, saying that he sealed his love for her with his blood, and that his betrayal was no doubt due to her husband, whose life he had again attempted in vain.

So he died! And his death was productive of results which bore materially on the future life of the man he had wronged.

Though the hope of marrying Paola must be abandoned, Harry still thought to protect her, and to this end sought Kalma and took her to New Orleans.

He was met by Ned Taunton, whose pale, grave face was ominous of a new blow.

"What is it, Ned?" asked Harry, with a sinking heart. "I am prepared for anything."

"My poor friend—"

But Harry interrupted him imperiously.

"Out with it! None of the slow torture of preparation for me! What has happened?"

"Harry, how could you help making the discovery? The Donna Inez we execrate is *her* cousin!"

Harry clenched his hand and set his teeth with a spasm of pain; but he said nothing.

"There is worse," continued Ned, his face showing the keen pain he felt in hurting his friend. "Oh, you must forget her! Harry, old fellow, you've suffered so much!—I'm afraid to tell you!"

"Ned, for God's sake!"

"She has eloped with a man who is guilty of forgery!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLIGHT!

"You little fool! I've got you now!"

Such was Donna Inez's reflection; but her

face gave no token of her malicious satisfaction. On the contrary, her eyes were moist with the dews of sympathy—a fair counterfeit—and holding her sorrowing cousin in a close embrace she murmured:

"My darling! my darling! you shall be saved!"

"Paola," she continued, "I have exhausted every resource but one. In this everything rests with yourself, dear."

"With me?" repeated Paola, in surprise.

"Darling, at first I thought it would come about naturally, of itself. I hoped so, and waited. Now I know why it has not."

"To what do you refer, Inez?"

"Cousin—dear sister!—Mr. Mansfield—Leslie has told me that on that day he proposed to you, and you refused him."

"Yes."

"You are not annoyed that he should have confided it to me?"

"Oh, no!"

"He has been and is very unhappy, dear. You must know—you cannot have failed to observe how devoted he is to you still."

"But, Inez—"

"Wait, dear. Remember that he saved your life. Then, instead of going off with piqued vanity, as most men would have done, he has stood by you with a love so pure, so disinterested, so delicate, that far from taking advantage of your distress to renew his importunities, as, again, most men would do, he has not even deemed such a thing possible. Lastly, he has resolved to quarrel with Mr. Dillingham, and call him out. Paola, I learned only last night, by an accidental remark dropped by one of Leslie's friends, that he has been practicing with a pistol every day for a month! When I taxed him with it he got confused, and ended by admitting that it was true. He said that he felt that it must come to this in the end."

"No, dear, I don't approve of dueling. It is all terrible! But that is a man's way of adjusting matters. What I wish to impress you with is the fact that when a man will deliberately jeopardize his life for a woman, without the hope of any return save her gratitude—for you cannot know how hopeless he is—he loves her with a passion rare both for its strength and its modesty."

"Paola, can you be wholly indifferent to such love?"

"Inez, I do appreciate his kindness; but I do not love him as a woman ought to love the man who is to be her husband."

"Dear, that is the American theory of the matter. The women of our country are not educated to such notions. Perhaps the question of expediency and general suitability is there given too great prominence; but it is at least worthy of grave consideration. It cannot be controverted that marriages in which passion is the dominant element, to the exclusion of more prudent considerations, very often fail in their promise of happiness; while, on the other hand, the quieter attachments are perhaps as frequently productive of a quiet, peaceful life."

"You certainly respect Mr. Mansfield?"

"Yes."

"And you have tastes in common? You enjoy his society?"

"Yes."

"He is in no way repugnant to you?"

"No."

"Then what more do you ask? Think of the alternative."

"Oh, that is terrible!"

"Knowing what you had escaped, and witnessing Leslie's devotion day by day, would you not learn to love him, dear?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know!" sighed Paola, hiding her face in her cousin's bosom and sobbing violently.

"Let me ask you an honest question, Paola. During these weeks of trouble Leslie has been near you constantly. Don't you feel nearer to him than you did?"

And poor Paola, in whose gentle bosom gratitude and pity were powerful sentiments, was fain to admit without nice analysis:

"Yes."

"That is proof, then, that your heart would yield to his constancy. And he will be only too glad to take you on your own terms. All he asks is the privilege of devoting his life to you."

"But I cannot marry him, if I would. Uncle would never consent."

"That is just it, dear. You would have to dispense with consulting him."

"Inez!"

"An elopement is your only resource!"

"Oh, Inez! An elopement!"

"Would you rather marry Mr. Dillingham?"

Paola shuddered.

"Desperate cases require desperate expedients," pursued Donna Inez. "If it could be helped I would not recommend anything clandestine."

"But I can fly from here without marrying Mr. Mansfield!" cried Paola catching at this avenue of escape from her painful dilemma.

"Unfortunately your guardian could follow you and bring you back. He would have all the law with him. But, once married, he would have to submit."

Hedged about on every side, poor Paola gave up the struggle. Inez knew by her abandoned weeping that the battle was almost won. It needed but the finishing stroke. Leslie alone could supply that.

They had been expecting him. Just at the nick of time Inez heard his footsteps.

"I will go to him, dear, and prepare him," said Inez. "And remember, Paola, that your whole future depends on your decision now. It is Mr. Dillingham, or Leslie. There is no more time for delay. Be brave, dear!—be wise!"

And with that parting admonition the treacherous woman left her victim all in a heap on the sofa.

"Now everything is ready at your hand," said Inez, meeting Leslie in the hall. "I have shown her that elopement is her only escape; and she has all but consented. Remember the elopement is my suggestion, though in accordance with your wishes. Your cue is the modest lover. Now, go to her!"

Pale with fear, yet thrilled by a wild hope, Leslie grasped Donna Inez's hands.

"God bless you!" he cried; "I owe you everything!"

"Waste none of your heroics on me," admonished the woman, impatiently. "Go! go!"

And he went.

If Leslie Mansfield's love was not of a very exalted type, his exultation, his gratitude were emotions strong enough to warm him to eloquence.

Lying all in a heap on the sofa and convulsed by sobs, this girl was a thing of beauty, to be taken to one's heart, and comforted, and cherished.

With a stride Leslie was beside her, and, sinking on one knee, clasped her in his arms.

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, "can it be true?—can it be true? Oh, if I could save you in this way! It is beyond my wildest hopes! Paola! Paola! if a life of devotion—a life of grateful tenderness—"

But his voice broke. He was struggling in silence with his emotions.

At first the girl shrunk from him; but prostrated in body as well as in mind, her resistance was feeble; and gradually she yielded, and sunk into this haven of rest.

He got her head on his shoulder; he brushed the damp hair from her temples; he kissed her with a respectful tenderness which soothed her. He had the sense to know that the lover's kiss on the lips was denied him; so he confined his caresses to her eyelids and forehead.

Again and again he breathed assurances into her ear, until her tears ceased to flow, her sobs were hushed, and only now and then an airy sigh escaped her lips.

Donna Inez, who had been on the watch, now tapped lightly on the door, and glided in.

Dropping on her knees before the two who now sat side by side, she took their hands, one of each, and, clasping them together, pressed them between her own.

"Oh, this is as it should be!" she said, cooingly. "I have hoped and prayed for this consummation! And you will be happy, dear—I know you will. But, Mr. Leslie, if you ever cause her a moment's sorrow—"

"If I ever do"—cried the lover.

"Make no rash invocations!" laughed Inez, caressingly. "You terrible men are all alike! You break the hearts of us poor women; but then we owe all our happiness to you too. Take care of her, Leslie," she pursued, with tender earnestness. "Remember that the sorrow of the last few weeks is enough for a lifetime."

"And now, my children," she continued, with an attempt at pleasantry, "the next question in order is when this modern hegira is to be put into execution. I confess that in anticipation of this solution of the difficulty I have thought the whole subject over. If it must be done, it were better be done quickly. I suggest to-morrow night."

"So soon?" cried Paola, startled.

"But, my dear, it must be done within a week, if at all; and delays are dangerous. Taking the night boat, we can reach Baton Rouge in the early morning; and before you

are missed at home the ceremony which places you out of all danger will have been performed."

Paola pleaded for more time; but the absence of any sufficient reason for delay, and Inez's superior will force overcame this opposition.

Leaving Paola to her wretchedness, the perfidious cousin went to inform her colleagues of the success of their plot.

Meanwhile, Leslie Mansfield being alone on the street, was absorbed in not altogether pleasant reflections, if his contracted brows were any indication of his mental state.

"It is the chance of my life," he muttered. "It is everything or nothing. I'm in the mire up to my neck, as it is. This is a chance to retrieve everything. If it fails—well, I've nothing to lose! So, here goes!"

At the conclusion of this reverie Mr. Leslie Mansfield's face took on the expression of a man who had yielded to a great temptation and set his face defiantly against fate. It was a look that boded poor, betrayed Paola no good.

The next day there was a strange brilliancy and restlessness about his eyes. He flushed and paled without apparent cause. He was nervously apprehensive. Again and again he involuntarily felt the left breast of his vest, to assure himself that a certain long wallet containing a thousand dollars in bank-notes had not vanished from as suddenly and mysteriously as it had entered an inner pocket.

That night the victim, almost swooning with terror, was fairly dragged from her house, driven to the quay, led across the gang-plank, and placed in a state-room of one of the "floating palaces" of the Mississippi.

At the last moment she had shown a disposition to recede from the scheme of elopement, on the ground that marriage with a man whom she did not love was wrong, even to save herself from the still more repugnant union with Dillingham; and nothing but Inez's decisive action, overpowering her cousin's enfeebled will, had saved the whole project from overthrow.

"Leslie," said Inez, when they stood outside the state-room in which Paola lay prostrated, "I am satisfied that at the last moment she will refuse to take the marriage vow!"

"What then are we to do?" asked Leslie.

"I have a plan which must be effective."

And glancing about that there should be no one to overhear their conversation, she whispered a moment in his ear.

"It seems cruel," said the man, with a look of compassion.

"It is for her good," said the woman. "It is too late for indecision now."

And giving him her hand, she deliberately left the boat, watched it as it swung into the stream and steamed away, and then drove home.

"Wnat! you back?" cried Wetherby and Dillingham in a breath, as she walked in upon them while they were drinking to the success of their infamous plot.

"The little fool would have receded at the last moment," said Inez; "but when she finds that she has compromised herself and will otherwise be a social outcast, I fancy she will be glad to get out of her false position by marrying even that little blonde dandy! Pahl! I had to manage everything for him as if he were a baby. Give me a man!"

"By the Lord Harry! you deserve a man, and a full-grown one, too!" cried Dillingham, with a burst of admiration. "Most royal lady, I know not whether to do greater homage to your genius or to your perfidy!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MARRIAGE.

FOR perhaps an hour Paola waited in vain for the return of her cousin. Then anxiety mastering her weakness, she got up from the berth where she had been lying and went out into the cabin.

Of course the traitress was nowhere to be seen.

"Maybe she's on de hurricane-deck, missus," said the chambermaid, when applied to. "Powerful lot o' ladies an' gemmen promenadin' up dah."

"Can't some one besent to look for Mr. Mansfield?" asked Paola.

"Sartainly, missus. Hil you, Sam! Stir you' lazy bones, dah! Dis lady wants a gemman—What's de name, missus?"

"Mr. Mansfield."

"You heah, Sam? None o' you' sogerin', now! Jest you pull foot lively, an' don't keep de lady waitin' all night!"

With a grin that threatened to sever his head in half and dart his eyes from their sockets,

Sam shuffled off, while mammy observed to Paola with a doleful shake of the head:

"Dese coons is powerful lazy, missus—'deed dey is!"

In due time Leslie presented himself.

"Where is Inez?" asked Paola.

"Why, isn't she with you?" asked Leslie, with simulated surprise.

"No. I haven't seen her since you left me together."

"Why, that is strange. I left her at the door of your state-room, an hour ago. She may have gone on the hurricane-deck. I will look her up."

Fifteen anxious minutes passed, and then Leslie returned, looking blank.

"She is not on the boat," he said. "She was seen to cross the gangplank just before the boat shoved off. She must have gone ashore for some reason—though why I cannot imagine—and been left."

"Inez not with us!"

With that terrible revelation all Paola's strength left her, and she would have fallen had not Leslie's arm sustained her.

We pass over that night of terrible suspense, when in the loneliness of her state-room the girl felt the incessant fears of one who fled in dangers that pressed on every har.

Under other circumstances she would have clung to Leslie with that sense of security which we all feel in the company of our friend; but the relation he was soon to assume toward her made her shrink from him.

When the boat reached Baton Rouge she yielded herself to his guidance because she had no one else to look to.

Leslie, who had as much heart as his selfishness would permit, was not devoid of solicitude for the pale, apprehensive creature whom he put into a carriage and drove to a hotel; but his assurances were of no avail.

"Paola," he said, when she had gone through the form of eating breakfast, though she scarcely touched a morsel, "the next boat, which is due this afternoon, will doubtless bring your cousin, if she can again escape observation and come. But if your flight is discovered, it will also bring your guardian. It behooves us, then, to have the ceremony over without delay, when we will be secure in any emergency."

But shrinking into the corner of the sofa, Paola cried, hysterically:

"Oh, no! no! no! Mr. Mansfield, I cannot! I cannot!"

"But, Paola, you do not mean to recede from your engagement?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know!" cried the distracted girl.

"Would you rather wait and marry Dillingham instead of me?" demanded Leslie.

"No—no."

"But these are alternatives."

Instead of answering, the girl sobbed.

Leslie Mansfield was a man, and therefore when reason seemed to coincide with his wishes he was impatient of unreasonableness. However, he had sense enough not to let his annoyance so far gain the mastery as to find expression in upbraidings, though at intervals throughout the whole morning he argued the point with Paola, with tears and moans as the only result.

His only hope was the arrival of Inez unattended by Wetherby.

At two o'clock a small steamer—not a regular passenger boat—touched the levee and Inez, unaccompanied, crossed the gangplank.

Though Leslie expected her, he was not in waiting, and pretended to be surprised at seeing her before the arrival of the regular boat.

Without removing her hat, she flung herself on her knees and clasped Paola in her arms.

It was a very dramatic and very pretty scene, and the flood of remorseful apology that poured from her lips was very natural.

Discovering the loss of her purse—so she said—and thinking that it must be in the carriage, she had gone ashore and so been left. A small freight boat had afforded her an opportunity to start before the regular passenger boat, which no doubt would contain the enraged guardian with officers of the law.

"The boat will be here in an hour. But you did not wait for me? The ceremony is already performed? This is no longer Paola Careno, but Mrs—"

"No! no! no! dear Inez!" interrupted Paola. "I couldn't do it! It would be wicked. I do not love him!"

"What!" cried Inez, starting back in affected dismay. "Paola, you are crazy! Why, dear—"

"Mr. Mansfield," said Inez, turning to that

riefful gentleman, "pray leave me with her a few minutes."

Leslie bowed, and withdrew.

"Paola," continued her false cousin, "do you realize the position in which you are placed? You must marry him. This unfortunate accident—or rather fortunate, I begin to think—has made it impossible for you to recede now. Dear, being alone with him, as you have, has compromised you so that nothing but a marriage will preserve your reputation. You know the censoriousness of the world. It would rather believe evil than good. And you have social rivals whose envy would prompt them to pull you down mercilessly.

"Not to speak of what you owe Leslie and the humiliation he would be subjected to by becoming the laughing-stock of all New Orleans, if you were to cast him off at the last moment—a humiliation under which I know he is too spirited to live—can you return and be a social outcast?"

Ring the changes on these arguments and bringing to bear all the magnetism of her positive will, Inez forced her less combative cousin into a state of passivity, and taking her assent for granted, dressed her in her hat and mantilla, and placing Leslie on the other side, took arm and led her to the carriage.

he battle had been a hard one; and the priest whose services they called into requisition was man of slow motions; so that when the ceremony was about to begin the three blended whistles of the approaching steamer were heard from far down the river.

Inez had labored with the desperation of one who realized all that was at stake in those few moments. When she heard the whistles her heart bounded with the consciousness that all would be accomplished before the boat could reach the levee.

But Paola was so weak and faint that she had to be supported on either side by her betrayers.

Inez constantly whispered words of encouragement in her ear, and from time to time held a vial of aromatic salts to her nostrils.

A fainting-fit now would be fatal. The girl could never again be brought to this point.

But the ceremony went on to its consummation, and those two were pronounced "one flesh."

In the wild triumph of that moment Leslie forgot every precaution, and clasped his bride in his arms.

"Mine! mine forever!" he cried, pressing a passionate kiss on her lips.

But she did not hear him. She neither responded to nor shrunk from his caress. He held an unconscious form in his arms.

Dizzy with the reaction which her overwrought feelings underwent when the strain of uncertainty was removed, Inez had turned to an open window for air.

Leslie's startled cry recalled her.

"It's only a fainting-fit," she said, with no trace of emotion. "She was very good to defer it until it could make no difference."

The mask had dropped. She could afford to appear in her true character now. Paola was no more to her than any other beggar. Her fair inheritance was forfeit, and the adventuress was come into the reward of her infamy.

They laid her on a wooden bench; and with so much attention as the presence of strangers made politic, Inez applied restoratives. But the swoon was an obstinate one; and she was still occupied when the sound of footsteps and the darkening of the doorway caused her to look round.

By the sight which met her gaze the adventuress was paralyzed.

Her husband, supported by Capt. Ned Taunton, stood in the doorway!

CHAPTER XXX. THE SUICIDE.

FOR a moment after the announcement of Paola's elopement with a forger, Harry Hazeltine stood speechless. What he suffered then no words can tell.

"My poor, poor friend!" cried Taunton, grasping his hands.

With an effort Harry aroused himself.

"Ned," he said, "while I was in Cuba I learned the identity of that woman with one of these cousins. But I learned more. I learned that fate had placed before her an opportunity to execute a most infamous plot. What you have just told me shows that she has availed herself of that opportunity and prosecuted it to a successful issue."

"But, Harry, what can you mean?"

"I mean that by the devilish arts of those by

whom she has been surrounded, to whom she has a right to look for protection, Paola Careno has been most foully betrayed, and somehow forced into this elopement."

"But for what object?"

"Money!—that accursed gold for which so many sell their souls!"

And in a few words Harry explained the purport of Don Alfonso's imprudent will.

"But may we not be in time to frustrate this infamy?" said Ned. "Last night, while parting with some friends, I saw the party—Mansfield and the cousins—come aboard the boat. Curiosity led me to examine the register just before the boat put off. Their destination was Baton Rouge."

"And how did she look?"

"Scarcely able to support herself. They led her between them."

"I knew it! I knew it!"

"Harry, there was that in their manner which even then led me to think that it was an elopement. Of course I knew nothing of Mansfield's criminality then. But knowing her relationship to that other, I thought you were well rid of her."

Harry groaned.

"Only this morning I learned that he had raised the money for this adventure by forging a note with his employers' indorsement, which he got discounted," pursued Taunton. "Of course, long before the note fell due, he expected to have the money with which the imaginary drawer could take it up, so that the firm whose credit had been used to make it negotiable would never discover the fact."

"Now we must save her from him at all hazards," said Harry. "Come!"

They caught the boat.

There was a party of gentlemen just before them, whom Ned pointed out as detectives.

"They are already on his track," he said.

"If he expects to proceed northward on this boat, he will be apprehended at the levee."

A hard, set look came into Harry's face. He said nothing.

Among the detectives he discovered Asa Dillingham, his head thrust forward from his round shoulders, his livid lips slightly tremulous, his ferret eyes blinking restlessly, his clammy hand with its yellow palm often raised to his mouth.

Immediately upon the discovery of Leslie's crime, Dillingham had put himself in conjunction with the detectives, to assist in the apprehension of his rival.

So the two parties proceeded on the same boat to Baton Rouge.

Touching the levee in the middle of the afternoon, while the detectives sought the town authorities, Harry Hazeltine procured a carriage and drove directly to the Catholic church, as it was of first importance to learn whether the marriage had already taken place.

This brought the wronged husband and the perfidious wife face to face for the first time in eight years.

Inez sprang to her feet with a cry of dismay. Then she shrunk abashed before the stern gaze of the man she had so wronged, who now, she felt, was come to frustrate all her plots just at the moment of their complete triumph.

Harry Hazeltine moved steadily into the room.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded Leslie, presenting a bold front, though Inez's evident disconcertion caused his heart to sink.

"You are Mr. Leslie Mansfield?" asked Harry, unmoved.

"I am, sir!" replied Leslie, brusquely.

"Have you consummated a marriage with this lady?"

"I have, sir!"

"Well, Mr. Mansfield, for your share in this infamous business I am about to make you a return which you do not deserve."

"Sir!"

"I am about to act the part of a friend," pursued Harry, not noticing the interruption; "that is to say, if you are not a coward as well as a villain."

"Coward! Villain!"

"I am about to give you an opportunity to preserve your dignity as a gentleman, though I think that your claim to that title is purely superficial. However, I believe that your vanity will lead you to shrink from the infamy of a common vagabond."

"By Heaven, sir!" blustered Leslie, menacingly, "I'll show you whether I am a gentleman or not!"

While the priest, extending his hands, said:

"Peace, my children! Remember, you are in the sanctuary!"

Ignoring this interruption, Harry proceeded with a nod of approval:

"I see you have sufficient spirit for my purpose."

"Explain yourself, sir. What do you mean?" demanded Leslie.

"I mean that the *forgery* of which you are guilty has been discovered, and the officers are now on your track!"

"Forgery!"

The word was uttered in a scared voice, yet musical withal; and the company turned to see that Paola had aroused from her fainting-fit, and was sitting up.

All but Leslie, who, ghastly with the fear of detected guilt, could not remove his eyes from Harry's stern face.

Harry Hazeltine would have spared the woman he loved the tragic scene that was to follow; but he was first and at all hazards determined upon her release from the disgraceful tie that bound her to a felon.

With the air of an implacable judge he proceeded:

"Mr. Mansfield, a gentleman does not wait to be branded like a common boor! I give you the opportunity to escape the infamy of standing in the felon's dock."

And he drew a pistol from his pocket.

"Would you murder me?" cried Leslie, starting back.

"No," replied Harry. "Public opinion will at least approve your courage if you open the door with your own hand. Take the weapon. Believe me, it is now your best friend."

"But I can escape!" cried Leslie, with a gleam of hope. "If you are my friend, as you say—"

"The officers will be here inside of five minutes. Ah! look from that window. Do you see them at the end of the street, coming this way?"

"But I have a carriage at the door!"

Leslie started forward, to carry his suggested escape into execution.

Harry opposed his passage immovably, with a second cocked pistol, which he drew from his pocket.

"You cannot leave this room alive, unless taken out by the officers of the law!" he said.

Then Leslie gave up.

"Have you the courage to accept the only avenue of escape open to you?" asked Harry, again presenting the pistol.

Leslie suddenly plucked spirit of despair.

"I have!" he said, taking the weapon recklessly.

"Wretched worms of earth, dare you brave the wrath of Heaven!" cried the priest.

But he appealed to deaf ears.

"You are right," was the wretched man's reply, "and I accept your kindly office. But before I leave this world I have a word to say."

Then turning to Paola, whom terror held motionless and speechless, he proceeded:

"My wife—for you *are* my wife!—I have loved you with a passion which has proved my destruction, as perhaps it would have been yours but for this interposition of fate. I was so determined to possess you that I did not stop at crime to gain the money without which this opportunity would have gone by default. Now I am about to prove that my love for you is not altogether selfish. When my folly exposed you to death by drowning, it was this man and not I, who saved your life. Now I commend you to his care. I know that he will protect you. Farewell, Paola! Remember that my last act was prompted by my love for you. Thus I release you from infamy!"

He raised the pistol to his head.

"Hold!" cried the priest. "Blasphemous wretch! if you dare to desecrate the sanctuary of the Most High by shedding your own blood at the very foot of the altar, I call down upon you the undying curse of Heaven!"

The old man was terrible in his invocation.

Paola covered her face with her hands, shuddering.

Donna Inez still stood like a woman of stone.

Leslie turned his eyes full upon the priest, and with an icy smile drew the trigger.

There was a ringing explosion; and the suicide fell without a moan!

Harry calmly knelt beside the fallen man. He was dead!

"And now," said the wronged husband, "for the woman whose brain conceived this foul plot!"

He turned.

Donna Inez had fled.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AS SHE HAD LIVED, SO DIED SHE!

We are aware that most, if not all, of our readers, will severely reprehend Harry Hazeltine's instigation of a suicide, no matter what the provocation. But we ask them to remember that he lived in an age in which it was the duty of a gentleman detected in crime to preserve his "honor" from the odium of public exposure and the punishment of a common rogue by taking his own life—a strange paradox, which has not altogether died out, even in this enlightened age.

Feeling that the only cause of regret was the shock Paola had been forced to sustain, Harry turned to her, and said:

"Miss Careno, there is no time, and this is no place, for an exposure of the wicked plot of which you have been the victim. The guilt of the wretched woman to whose treachery you owe all your misery is sufficiently proved by her flight."

"What! Inez?—cousin Inez?" cried Paola, in bewilderment.

"Is your bitterest foe!—a traitress of the vilest stamp! Has she not fled when I appeared to unmask her?"

"Inez untrue to me! Then whom have I left?" moaned poor Paola.

"Will you trust me?" asked Harry, with an unwonted faltering of the voice.

"He said you saved my life," said the girl, referring to her dead husband with a shudder.

And with her eyes fixed on Harry's with a confident gaze, she placed her hands in his.

"God willing," said our hero, fervently, "I will go one step further, and restore to you that happiness which alone makes life valuable!"

Without more ado he placed her in the carriage, having presented her to his friend Ned Taunton, and the party drove to the levee, where a steamer was already rounding into view up the river, on its way to New Orleans.

Meanwhile Donna Inez had stopped her carriage and called Asa Dillingham to her, on meeting him in company with the detectives.

"Yonder you will find your man, dead—a suicide!" she said to the chief, who immediately withdrew with his men.

"Mr. Dillingham," she pursued, "we are ruined. My husband is there. He has just forced Leslie Mansfield to commit suicide. He will crush the rest of us as ruthlessly. Our only hope is to get what we can and escape—you and I. We must force Wetherby to divide with us, and then fly."

"Agreed!" said Dillingham. "Shall we take the same boat that conveys your gallant husband and fair cousin back to the city?"

"Why not? What can he do to us?"

"Have us arrested for conspiracy, my dear."

"But if he wishes to do that he might have us taken now."

"True. Perhaps the bold policy is the best."

So it happened that all the living returned together, the remains of Leslie Mansfield being alone delayed. But the defeated conspirators had the prudence to keep in retirement.

Donna Inez and Dillingham hastened home and astonished the false guardian with the announcement that the bubble had burst, and the demand that he at once convert the trust fund into ready money and make a division of the spoils.

"But," objected the prudent Wetherby, "I can account dollar for dollar. The trust 'as not suffered in my 'ands. It 'as been well hinvested, and we 'ave lived on the revenue. To be sure it will himpovertish me; but I can clear my skirts. Why, then, hopen the penitentiary door for myself to enrich you? You may go to the devil—both of you—for hall the love I bear you!"

"Exactly!" assented Asa Dillingham. "Your prudence is very commendable. But would you rather return to Botany Bay, where your neck will be sure to be stretched, or pocket a portion of this money and run your chances of being caught?"

"You can't betray me without becoming yourself hinvolved in the murder of the man I personate."

"Excuse me! I will swear, as will all my crew, that we never saw the man; but were paid by you to testify as we did. The worst that you can bring on me is imprisonment for a term, while I can hang you!"

That clinched the argument.

Paola's inheritance had been converted into stocks and bonds. These were put on the market on the following day, through an agent, and the proceeds invested in diamonds, which could easily be carried on the person.

But an event occurred which changed the distribution of these ill-gotten gains.

Donna Inez found a letter in a large official envelope awaiting her. It was the letter which Don Manuel had written before his death. It had been delayed by official "red tape," for which the Spanish authorities are noted. Accompanying it was an official notification of the writer's execution as a traitor.

Donna Inez read it through with a marble pallor of face and a stony stare in her eyes.

Then the full force of her love for this man asserted itself.

What were her feelings, what were her thoughts, was indicated only by what she did. From that moment she never spoke or uttered a sound.

Locking the door against her maid, she dressed herself with exquisite taste, in light flowing draperies. The last letter *his* hand had traced she put in her bosom.

From her jewel-case she took a heavy gold ring, of strange, antique workmanship, mounting what looked like a large green stone.

Next she composed herself gracefully on a sofa,

arranging her drapery with careful hand and artistic eye.

Touching a secret spring in the ring, the top of the seeming stone flew up, showing that it was a mere shell, a receptacle for a few drops of a dark-green liquid.

With a steady hand the strange woman put the deadly vial to her lips, sucked its poison, closed the lid, and composed herself as to sleep.

When they found her she lay in all her treacherous beauty; but her soul had fled.

"I am disappointed in her, and yet she has proved consistent," commented Dillingham, argumentatively. "Having fought so gallantly, she yielded at last to a womanly weakness, and killed herself on account of a man. But instead of taking the veil, as a more wishywashy woman might have done, she squared accounts with a right royal hand. She was a magnificent woman, by Heaven!"

"We hought not to quarrel with 'er. She 'as hincreased our plunder by fifty per cent.!" was Wetherby's summing up.

There is no love lost between rogues.

"And now," said Dillingham, "I am determined to have Paola Careno! She has been taken to the house of a widow a little way out of the city. The only man on the premises is this Indian servant of the gallant Mr. Hazeltine. I wish you to accompany me to get the girl out of the house by your authority, if possible. If not, we will use force. Once in possession of her, you may go your way, and I will go mine."

James Wetherby was disposed to run no further risk; but Asa Dillingham insisted.

Harry Hazeltine had taken Paola to a country house, where the quiet and pure air might exercise their recuperative force, and given her into the care of an elderly woman and her widowed daughter. Kalma attended her, and Vikir stood guard, while Harry returned to the city to look after her pecuniary interests.

The shades of night were falling when a close carriage stopped a little way from the house, and two men dismounted and found their way to Paola's apartment, all the rooms of the house being on the ground floor.

While Paola arose from her chair and indignantly confronted her false guardian, demanding the meaning of the intrusion, Kalma stood in the background, her eyes fixed, as if fascinated, on Asa Dillingham's face.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FINAL BLOW.

"PAOLA," said Wetherby, "for the contempt you 'ave manifested for my hauthority, for the hinsult hofferred to my hestemed friend, Mr. Dillingham, I 'ave no words! But the wound to your hown reputation, when you so far forget yourself as to place yourself hunder the protection of a stranger, I beg you to consider. I am more pained than hangered. Return to your 'ome and duty, and all will be forgiven."

"Mr. Wetherby," said Paola, with as much grief as indignation in her voice, "it is useless to multiply words. Your hypocrisy has been unmasked. You have forfeited every moral claim to my obedience, and soon the law will cancel the legal tie which you have dishonored. Could my father have looked forward to this day—"

But her voice broke and tears sprung to her eyes.

"You refuse to return 'ome with me?" demanded Wetherby.

"I no longer have a home with you, sir."

"Then I must resort to force."

"I shall call for help."

"Which will havail you nothing. Mr. Dillingham, hassist me!"

And Wetherby advanced threateningly.

"Help! Help! Vikir!" cried Paola.

Then Kalma sprung before her mistress.

"Back, leperos!" she cried, confronting the would-be abductors with flashing eyes. "Lay not your hands on this lady!"

"Throw the vixen aside!" cried Dillingham, who was behind his compeer.

But at this moment the door was thrown violently open, and Vikir rushed in.

"My brother! *mira!* our enemy!" cried Kalma, pointing to Dillingham. "The murderer of our father! He who carried me into captivity!"

An instant Vikir stood like one entranced. Then his lips drew back, showing his white teeth like the fangs of some beast of prey.

Dillingham saw the gleam of a dagger, as his fate rushed upon him.

He drew a pistol and fired; but the next instant he went down, with the blood welling from a hole in his breast.

As Vikir rose, James Wetherby struck him a violent blow on the head, which knocked him senseless.

Now the false guardian thought only of flight; but remembering the diamonds which Dillingham had on his person, he stooped down and hurriedly dispossessed him.

From without came the sound of rapidly approaching horse's hoofs.

With a startled look Wetherby rose to fly.

But the fumbling for the diamonds had roused Dillingham.

"You would rob me, you devil, would you?" he cried. "Hold on! You can't get away with that plunder!"

And though at the very gate of death, he fired at his treacherous ally.

But the shot fired by the stiffening hand took no effect, and Wetherby rushed from the room unharmed.

But a stern voice cried:

"Halt! Surrender!"

A horse was leaped over the paling that surrounded the house, and as he bounded to the side of the fugitive and was drawn back on his haunches, a heavy hand grasped the collar of James Wetherby's coat, the rider leaped from the saddle, executed a wrestler's trip, and the career of the false guardian and impostor was over!

Harry Hazeltine had gone to Wetherby's house to effect his arrest, found him gone, and tracked him hither.

Now he dragged his prisoner into the house, where he was joined by Ned Taunton and the officers of the law.

"I have but two words before I die," said Asa Dillingham. "Strip the clothing from the back of that escaped convict, and behold the brands of the queen! He is Thomas Kittridge! I denounce him as the murderer of James Wetherby, whom he has personated for thirteen years!"

But the violent passion of the ex-slaver, Captain Gaskill, for such he was, precipitated his end. The exertion of rising on his elbow and shaking his fist at the traitor who had taken the first opportunity to rob and desert him, caused a hemorrhage, and he fell back, dead.

Vikir's vengeance was complete!

Tom Kittridge's back was laid bare, and the livid marks of the brand discovered.

He was handed over to the British Government, and returned to Botany Bay, where he expiated his many crimes on the scaffold.

A year has passed.

Paola is reinstated in her Cuban home.

She is reclining in a bamboo easy-chair on the broad veranda.

At her feet sits Harry Hazeltine, with a look of mingled joy and pride. He is no longer emaciated and pale, but rounded into the full outlines of robust health.

He has been telling her his life—how he met and parted with her cousin; how, after that blow, he traveled the world over, a prey to bitterness; how in the Orient he contracted the fatal habit of opium-smoking; how, under the inspiration of his love for her, and aided by his faithful Vikir, he threw off the yoke of slavery to the drug, though it seemed as if it would cost him his life; and how the fruition of her love was the one boon he now craved of Heaven! Was the bright dream of the year just passed to banish forever the darkness that had gone before?

While he was talking her eyes were directed across the lawn to where Kalma was arranging some flowers which Vikir had gathered, while Ned Taunton looked on with a smile on his bronzed, sailor face—a pretty picture, until sympathetic tears hid it from her view. When he was done she turned her beautiful face to his, placed her delicate hands in his, and satisfied his heart with the answer:

"Yes!"

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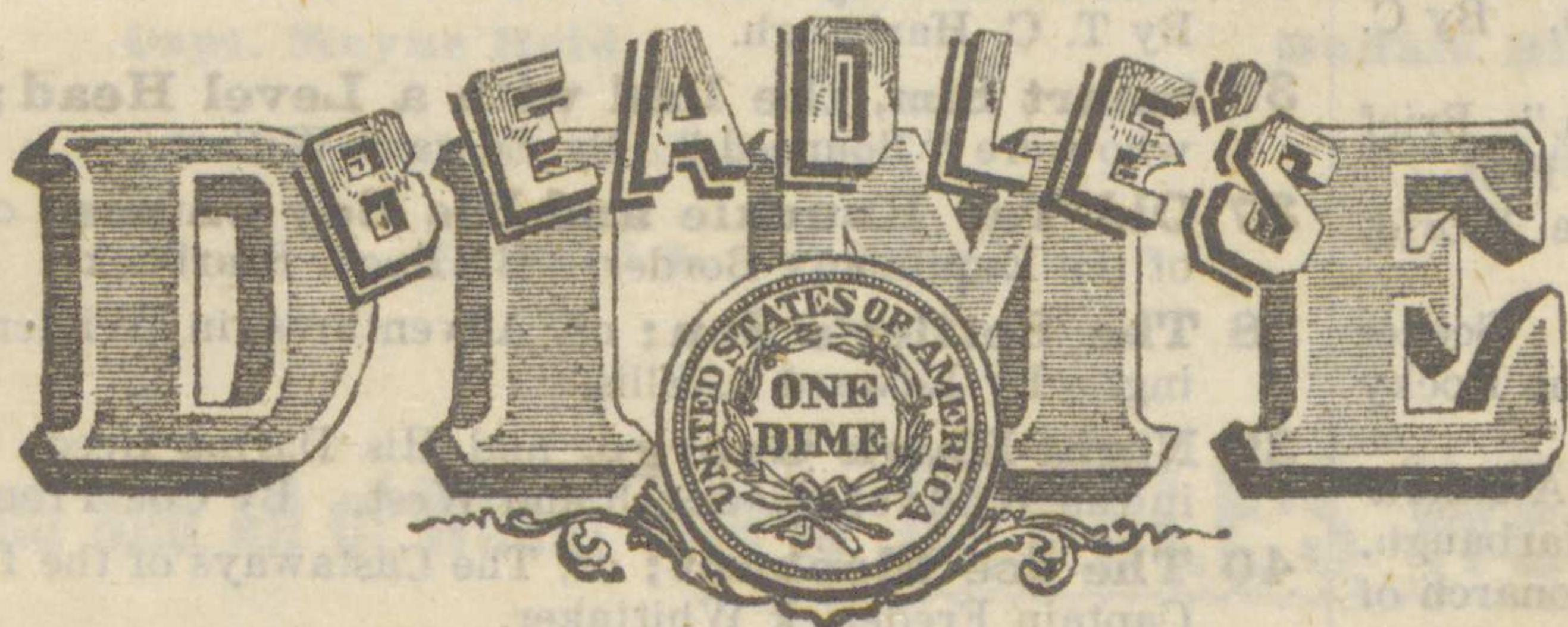
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